

THE EU DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND THE MOBILITY OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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The EU diploma supplement is one of the mechanisms being used to resolve various issues currently being dealt with in higher education in Europe, such as, for example, the order of precedence amongst degree holders from educational systems in different countries. An analysis is made of the diploma's function as an instrument to facilitate the academic and professional recognition of qualifications and the competences acquired during the study period, irrespective of the country or system in which the educational process has taken place. The specific aims of the EU diploma supplement, which forms part of the portfolio of Europass documents, is described, together with its basic content, the role of language/s, and the diploma supplement's main formal characteristics. The situation regarding the recognition of higher degrees in Spain is also analysed, with special reference given to the latest regulations adopted and the Lisbon agreement on the recognition of foreign qualifications. The article also describes the prospects for the effective implementation of the EU diploma supplement in Catalonia and the main conclusions regarding the diploma supplement in general.

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1. Introduction: “So there was a German, a Frenchman and a Catalan...”

“So there was this German, a Frenchman and a Catalan sitting on top of a plane...”. This is one way of introducing a certain type of joke that plays with national idiosyncrasies. Not always really funny, they seek to exploit the humour in supposed stereotypes that characterise a particular country and normally end up ironically attributing the nationality/ies in question with some form of inherent ingenuity or stupidity.

Within the field of European higher education and education in general, the diversity of systems that are in force in different countries produces a great variety of idiosyncrasies that stand in the way of understanding and, in fact, lead to misunderstanding. Diversity is of course not negative in itself. Quite the opposite: it is a necessary factor that greatly enhances the whole. There is a wide consensus, however, about the advisability of promoting mechanisms that, while maintaining this diversity, make it compatible with comparability and reciprocal understanding. This means overcoming

the type of misunderstandings alluded to in the joke referred to above without trying to homogenise different national characteristics and traditions or, more importantly, affecting the development of culture/s and language/s involved in the process of education.

How can precedence be established between degree holders from educational systems in different countries?

So, for example, if a particular institution wishes to offer scholarships to people who have studied in particular countries, how can it be sure that people with more and better academic merits are treated fairly? Or in the selection of students for a postgraduate or PhD study programme, for example, how can precedence be established between degree holders from educational systems in different countries? Or if a company interviews various university degree holders for a job, how can it distinguish the professional competences of

candidates of different nationality, such as Rumanian, Swedish or Catalan?

The Europass document portfolio is a series of documents that citizens can use to present their qualifications and competences at important times in their careers.

The article firstly characterises the EU diploma supplement as one of the mechanisms for resolving these issues and analyses its function as an instrument for facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications and competences obtained by an individual, irrespective of the country or system in which the educational process has taken place. After establishing the context of the EU diploma supplement within the Europass document portfolio, a description is given of the specific aims of the European supplement, its basic content — with special emphasis on the most important section, which is on content and the results obtained by the holder—, the role of language in the European supplement and its main formal features. The situation regarding the recognition of higher degrees in Spain is then analysed, with special reference to the most recent regulations adopted, which have partially extended the authority of the universities, even though Spain is one of the few European countries that has still not endorsed the Lisbon agreement on the recognition of foreign qualifications. A description is then given of the

prospects for the effective implementation of the EU diploma supplement in Catalonia, with special attention given to the difficulties arising during the initial stage. The last section gives the author’s conclusions.

2. The EU diploma supplement within the framework of the Europass portfolio

2.1 The Europass documents

In recent years, and particularly following the impetus of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, numerous projects and actions have been carried out within the framework of the institutional proceedings of the European Union, as well as others dealing with Europe as a whole and at the international level, to increase the transparency of people’s qualifications and skills (or competences, as they have become termed). It is believed that this increased transparency will facilitate mobility in Europe and all over the world, both for learning purposes and the practice of different professions in different countries and sectors. Needless to say, increased mobility is indissolubly linked to an improvement in the quality of training and the aptitudes acquired by people, which must in turn contribute to their competitiveness, in the terms of the so-called (and frequently referred to) Lisbon strategy.

One of the initiatives that seeks to develop this transparency is the Europass document portfolio,¹ which consists of a series of documents that citizens can use to use to present their qualifications and competences at important times in their

¹ See Decision no. 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 15 December 2004, on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass), Bulletin of the European Union, 31/12/2004.
Available from: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/eu/oj/2004/1_390/1_39020041234en00060020.pdf.

personal careers, such as making an application for a learning activity (from a short course to admission to a PhD study programme), or applying for a job. Pursuant to Decision no. 2241/2004/EC, the five Europass documents at the present time are:

- Europass CV.
- Europass mobility.
- Europass diploma supplement.
- Europass language passport.
- Europass certificate supplement.

This is not an exhaustive list and in fact the above-mentioned Decision envisages the appearance of other documents, provided that they fulfil certain requirements concerning their relevance, that is, that they actually represent an improvement in the transparency of competences and qualifications, the European and international dimension, and the viability and scope of language recognition. This article focuses on the description of one of these Europass documents, the Europass diploma supplement, also known as the EU diploma supplement, which is the form adopted according to Spanish legislation.² Nevertheless, it is of interest to summarise the basic information regarding the other four documents, details of which are given below.

The Europass curriculum vitae or Europass CV is undoubtedly the most far-reaching and ambitious document. It offers citizens a model for presenting their skills and qualifications in a systematic, chronological and flexible way. As the name

indicates, the Europass CV enables a person to present an overview of his or her education, work experience, and personal abilities and skills acquired throughout the person's life, as well as skills acquired outside official educational institutions (language skills, technical, social, organisational and computer abilities and skills, artistic abilities, driving licence, etc.). The Europass Mobility document is a personal document that is used to record an organised period of time (a mobility experience) or learning itinerary that a person spends in another European country for the purpose of learning or training. It contains information regarding the education and training or work experience acquired during the training itinerary, irrespective of whether this leads to a certificate or formal qualification or not. The Europass Language Passport, which forms part of the European language portfolio, is a document in which individuals can record their language learning and relevant cultural experiences and skills. Designed to enhance the motivation of individuals so they can improve their ability to communicate in different languages and to pursue new learning and inter-cultural experiences, it shows the level of skill that the person has attained in foreign languages according to internationally comparable parameters. The Council of Europe definition of these parameters has been widely disseminated.³ In addition to providing information, the document has also been designed to enhance the motivation of individuals to improve their ability to communicate in different languages and to pursue new learning and inter-cultural experiences. The

² Royal Decree 1044/2003, of 1 August, which establishes the procedure for universities to issue the EU diploma supplement (Official Bulletin of the Spanish State, BOE no. 218, of 11/9/2003, Catalan language version in the Catalan Supplement no. 19, of 1/10/2003, in Catalan). Available from: http://www.boe.es/boe_catalan/dias/2003/10/01/pdfs/A03596-03601.pdf.

³ This refers to the common European framework of reference for languages, the aims of which, in terms of language, are very similar to those of the EU diploma supplement regarding degree qualifications. The setting up of a framework for languages began before this, however, as this was based on the conclusions of a symposium held, at the initiative of the Swiss federal Government, in Rüşlikon in November 1991, the most outstanding features of which were: "the desirability of introducing a common European framework of reference for language learning at all levels: - to promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in different countries. - the mutual recognition of language qualifications. - to assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts". See Council of Europe (2000), p. 11-12.

Europass Certificate Supplement is delivered to people who hold a vocational education and training certificate; it provides additional information to that which is already included in the official certificate, making it more easily understood, especially by employers or institutions outside of the issuing country. This is a kind of EU diploma supplement that refers not to university education but to professional training. In addition to this information, the Certificate Supplement includes details of any skills and competences acquired and details of occupations the holder is qualified to perform.

For documents that certify a person’s academic qualifications, it is no longer sufficient to just translate the documents —sworn translations or not—, with, in certain cases, enclosed jurats and diplomatic legalisations.

As is mentioned further on, the Europass documents are merely instrumental however and by no means do they ensure the comparability of the level of qualifications. Development of the Europass documents is therefore ultimately linked with the setting up of the European Qualifications Framework. In the words of the European Commission, in a proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), dated 5 September 2006:

“The future development of Europass will need to reflect the establishment of the EQF (European

Qualifications Framework). All relevant Europass documents, in particular the Europass diploma supplement and the Europass certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level”.⁴

2.2 Specific aims of the EU diploma supplement

The questions posed in the introduction become highly important in a world where people’s mobility and all types of exchange between countries are increasing at great speed. Available mechanisms for dealing with this up until now have been overtaken by events. It is no longer sufficient to just translate the documents —sworn translations or not—, accompanied in certain cases by jurats and diplomatic legalisations. Documents certifying a person’s academic qualifications that are presented in this way only provide information on a study programme or curriculum normally understood to be a mere list of subjects in a certain disciplinary field and it can only assure the fact that a legally established institution in a particular country exists and, if one is lucky, the appropriateness of the formal competence and reliability of the academic authorities that endorse it. If, on the other hand, one is unaware of the structure of the country’s educational system and the issuing institution, these documents do not reveal very much about the qualifications and competences of the holder of a particular academic qualification. When all is said and done, it is impossible to know exactly what the person has learned and, above all, is capable of doing in an academic or professional environment on obtaining the corresponding qualification, according to the terms in which Purser considers the results of learning to be a key element for the recognition of degrees:

⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2006 p.4.

“Learning outcomes are important for recognition, since the basis for recognition procedures is in the process of shifting from quantitative criteria such as the length and type of courses studied, to the outcomes reached and competencies obtained during these studies. The principle question asked of the student or graduate will therefore no longer be “what did you do to obtain your degree?” but rather “what can you do now that you have obtained your degree?”. This approach is of more relevance to the labour market, and is certainly more flexible when taking into account issues of lifelong learning, non-traditional learning, and other forms of non-formal educational experiences”.⁵

The aims of the EU diploma supplement consist in overcoming these doubts and to deal in a satisfactory way with the questions posed in the introduction and others not expressed here. In short, the diploma supplement seeks to help third parties understand the qualifications and skills accredited to the person issued with the supplement, without the need for extensive knowledge of the educational system in which it was acquired.⁶ In essence, the EU diploma supplement, in relation to academic exchanges and the mobility of university graduates, can play the same role as the euro does for economic transactions between different countries. As with the European currency, the EU diploma supplement is a neutral phenomenon, i.e. it imposes no obligations regarding recognition of the

qualifications that it describes. The recipient body or company presented with the European supplement can freely decide how it deals with the information on the person accrediting the qualifications, although in a more accurate way because it is more in a position to know full well. This will undoubtedly facilitate mobility because it eliminates a highly significant obstacle, namely, the relative opaqueness that characterises each system in relation to any another. For this reason, the term transparency appears frequently in the described aims of the supplement.

If one is unaware of the structure of the country’s educational system and the issuing institution, the documents that certify a person’s academic qualifications do not reveal very much at all about the qualifications and skills of the holder.

2.3 Structure: the eight sections of the EU diploma supplement⁷

The structure of the EU diploma supplement is relatively simple and is made up of eight sections, as in table 1:⁸

⁵ PURSER, L. (2002) p.5

⁶ This undoubtedly makes more sense when the countries in question have different educational systems, although it may also be useful for qualifications obtained in the same system and in neighbouring institutions, given the simplicity with which certificates and other informative documents are customarily issued in higher education.

⁷ To analyse the sections, we took into account the conclusions of the document drawn up by the SETCAT working group formed on 16 June 2005, that consisted of representatives from the Catalan universities that participate in the decision-making process on university studies being offered in Catalonia (*Programació Universitària de Catalunya*) and the former Ministry for Universities, Research and the Information Society (DURSI), at the request of the CIC’s (InterUniversity Council of Catalonia) committee for academic programming and planning (*Comissió de Programació i Ordenació Acadèmica*). The members of the working group were Paquita Blázquez (UB), Aurora Contreras (UAB), Paco Navallas (UPC), Pau Solà (UPF), Vicenç Segura (UdG), Danae Sarradell (UdL), Angels Olivé (URV) Carles Ramírez and Carme Uroz (UOC), Anna Cervera (URL), Montserrat Vilalta (UVic), Manel Messeguer (UIC), Joan Bravo (DURSI), Montserrat Solé (DURSI) and Pere Torra (DURSI).

⁸ See article 7 and annex IV of the above mentioned Decision no. 2241/2004/EC. For the Spanish regulation, see article 4 and annexes I and II of the abovementioned Royal Decree 1044/2003, of 1 August.

The key element of all these sections is without doubt section 4, on “Information on the content and results gained”. This section is the most specific and presents the most valuable and interesting information for the recipient of the document. Special attention is thus given to this section. Information in the other sections, which can be consulted at the sources quoted, is not especially innovative although care has been taken to ensure that the information is contextual, thereby enabling it to be comprehensible to a third party —normally in a different country— who is unfamiliar with the system in question.

The recipient body or company presented with the European supplement can freely decide how it deals with the information on the person accrediting the qualifications.

Aside from section 1, which gives the personal particulars (name and surname, date of birth, etc.), section 4 is the only one that contains personalised, individual information in that it records the information on the academic results obtained by the holder. Given the information systems available to universities and higher education institutions in Europe, the representation of the results obtained by a person at an institution throughout their period of study should not be that difficult. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that the information on the holder asked for in section 4 includes (i.e. is not isolated from) the context in which it has been produced. The only way that the academic results obtained by a person can be correctly understood is obviously only in relative terms, and their interpretation by third parties should not require a complex exercise involving accounting or arithmetic.⁹ In addition to each graduate’s results, the EU diploma supplement also requires that the distribution of qualifications in the series of courses in the curriculum corresponding to the holder’s student cohort and the previous one is included, as we shall see further on.

Table 1
Sections of the EU diploma supplement

1. Information regarding the holder
2. Information identifying the qualification
3. Information on the level of the qualification
4. Information on the content and results gained
5. Information on the function of the qualification
6. Additional information
7. Certification of the supplement
8. Information on the national higher education system

The subheadings in section 4 are given below in table 2 and, because of their importance, various brief comments are made.

With regard to section 4.1, “Mode of study”, our opinion is that the Spanish Royal Decree does not succeed in dealing with this correctly, at least as far as what has been understood in other countries. In most countries, as far as we know, a distinction is made under Mode of study between full and part time studies.¹⁰ Under this subheading, the distinc-

⁹ As Guy Haug very accurately states (1997), p. 1: “The first function of grades is to convey a message, and the real challenge in interpreting foreign grades is to render that same message in a different language”.

¹⁰ See, for example, the supplements of Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Rumania and Slovenia at <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/htm/index.htm>. In the Irish supplement under *mode of study*, the term *full-time* is given. In the Portuguese case, under the expression *regime de estudos* the equivalent Portuguese term *tempo inteiro* is given.

tion made by both the Spanish Decree Order and the form approved by the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities is between classroom-based, distance learning or mixed. This distinction does not specify the values that correspond to the various types, given that many training programmes which are mainly classroom-based envisage distance learning activities and, vice versa, distance learning programmes may involve certain activities where the presence of the student is required (for example, assessment), although in neither case are they considered to be mixed programmes.¹¹

Table 2
Subheadings in section 4, “Information on the contents and results obtained”

4.1. Mode of study
4.2. Programme requirements
4.3. Programme details
4.4. Grading scheme
4.5. Overall classification of qualification

Although the fact that the classroom-based nature of a programme is an interesting factor, we believe it advisable to also take into account the distinction between full and part time study for the very reason that, even though there are many part time students studying at Catalan universities, there is

very little formal, express recognition of part-time studies. This would be highly appropriate and, in our opinion, the universities should make the effort to adapt study programmes to the different profiles of students that are admitted and not the reverse.

In addition to each graduate’s results, the EU diploma supplement also requires that the distribution of qualifications in the series of courses in the curriculum corresponding to the holder’s student cohort is included.

On the other hand, section 4.2 on “Programme requirements” incorporates the generic requirements of the programme, according to the curriculum approved by the university. One of the problems we find with this subheading and the following two in relation to the European supplements of other countries is the fact that, in the case of the Spanish regulation, it is a European supplement for degree qualifications that were applicable when the Royal Order was published in September 2003, and the information refers to degrees that are lacking both the structure and characteristics deriving from the principles of the Bologna Declaration.¹² They

¹¹ As a way of resolving this, a programme can be considered to mixed when there is a figure near to, but not more than, 30% for activities of a non-classroom based nature. In this case, as a way of ensuring that the adjective is understood, the term “Mixed: classroom-based and distance learning” is suggested. One must also bear in mind that Royal Decree 779/1998, of 30 April (Spanish Official Bulletin, BOE no. 104, of 1/5/1998), which modified the general guidelines for curricula, established a maximum percentage for guided academic activities that can be attributed to credits; in practice, 70 % of the ten hours that make up one credit would have to be dedicated to either class-based theoretical or practical work, apart from the distance learning universities. In accordance with article 2.7, subsection two, of the Royal Decree:

“With the exception of university distance learning courses, the credit percentage corresponding to guided distance learning academic activities must in no case exceed thirty percent. The credit equivalence of the remaining subjects may differ to that given in the previous paragraph”.

¹² The first officially recognised degrees to be offered in Catalonia under the fully adapted European Higher Education Area (EHEA) structure are the recognised Masters programmes that began this academic year (2006-2007). See Order UNI/203/2006, of 18 April, concerning the implementation of officially recognised postgraduate programmes (Master’s and PhD degrees) approved within the framework of university planning in Catalonia, for 2006-2007, at public and private universities, respectively (Official Bulletin of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia, DOGC no. 4623, of 28/4/2006). Nevertheless, one should remember that, since the 2004-2005 academic year, Catalan universities have offered different university-awarded (as to officially recognised) qualifications that fully comply with the European structure and are based on the structure currently in force within the framework of the Pilot Plan for adapting degrees to the European Area of Higher Education, two runs of which have already been programmed. The first agreement was signed on 14 May 2004 between the Ministry for Universities, Research and the Information Society (DURSI), the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System (AQU Catalunya), and the Catalan universities.

therefore do not correspond with the undergraduate and postgraduate structure and do not use a comparable system of credits like the ECTS, etc.

In the case of Spain, the information on the generic requirements of programmes refer to degrees that lack both the structure and characteristics deriving from the principles of the Bologna Declaration, that do not correspond with the undergraduate and postgraduate structure and do not use a known comparable system of credits like the ECTS.

Section 4.3 on “Programme details” gives the list of courses that the holder has passed, together with the attributes that are usually given: teaching hours, which, as we have already said, is normally obtained from the number of credits multiplied by the set conversion factor (ten hours¹³ unless another equivalency expressed in the curriculum or an EU directive is given), the qualification and academic year in which the course was passed. Lastly, there is also a box for observations on many different aspects regarding the subject, including how the subject has been passed (validated, taken in mobility programmes, recognised hours, etc.); if a language other than Catalan or Spanish was used on the course; under admissions to the second

cycle, the specific character of complementary credits can be entered, which are compulsory credits for these students, etc. Information on other aspects relevant to the holder’s record could also apparently be added under this subheading, such as the mode of study (class-based, distance learning, and mixed); specialisations; specific form of admission to the programme;¹⁴ etc.

Section 4.4 on the “Grading scheme” contains information of great interest for contextualising the results obtained by the holder of the supplement in relation to the results obtained by graduates in the same subject from the same university over the two previous years. These details are logically obtained from the qualifications, weighted according to the credits passed, of all graduates of the same year and the year prior to when the holder graduated. The question of weighting is important for the very reason that a qualitative system (fail, pass, good, excellent and with distinction, *matricula de honor*) was replaced by a quantitative one (a numerical scale from 0 to 10, with one decimal point) in modifications made to the university qualifications system in 2003.¹⁵ Although the new system is more refined and has an appropriate academic tradition even in non-university education, the universities may have difficulties with the weighting of qualifications and obtaining averages due to the coexistence of different systems, which could be resolved by way of a process of qualification conversion.

Section 4.5 on the “Overall classification of qualification” establishes an overall average for

¹³ See article 2.7 of Royal Decree 1497/1987, of 27 November (Spanish Official Bulletin, BOE no. 298, of 14/12/1987), amended by Royal Decree 779/1998, of 30 April (Spanish Official Bulletin, BOE no. 104, of 1/5/1998).

¹⁴ This information may be useful for helping the recipient body or enterprise to understand that it is possible in the Spanish system for one graduate to have 300 credits, and for another who has entered directly into the second cycle of the same study programme to have done so with only 150 credits from the curriculum.

¹⁵ See Royal Decree 1125/2003, of 5 December, which establishes the European credit system and the system of qualifications for university degrees officially recognised at the national level in Spain (Spanish Official Bulletin, BOE no. 224, of 18/9/2003; Catalan language supplement no. 20, of 16/10/2003).

Available from: http://boe.es/boe_catalan/dias/2003/10/16/pdfs/A03679-03680.pdf (in Catalan).

the qualifications obtained by the holder weighted according to the number of credits per subject. The numerical scale used (pass: 1; good: 2; excellent: 3; and with distinction: 4) is, curiously enough, not the one adopted recently in the abovementioned Royal Decree on qualifications that was published one week later. Nevertheless, one can understand how this corresponds to the idea of using a temporary bridging system that provides for conversion between the qualitative and quantitative systems that currently coexist in Catalan universities.

2.4 Language and the EU diploma supplement

The inclusion of language in the EU diploma supplement involves two aspects. On the one hand, there are references to the language in which corresponding subjects are given, which also must be entered in the supplement, and, on the other, the language or languages in which the supplement itself, as a document that accredits certain specific academic qualifications, is issued.

With regard to the latter, and as to be expected in academic circles, English is predominant as far as the language used. According to the EUA report Trends IV :

“All HEIs (High Education Institutions) in the study planned to issue the Diploma Supplement in English, with some also in the national language(s) (in Austria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). One HEI plans to issue the Diploma Supplement in three languages and one, upon request, is willing to issue it in all official EU languages”.¹⁶

The presence of English is in fact widespread and tends to be supported just with a version in one or more national language(s). In the case of Catalan, and in accordance with the regulatory framework mentioned various times above, three languages are used: Catalan, Spanish and English. These three languages all have to appear on an equal basis as in any multilingual documentation, in particular reference to Catalan, which is of lesser diffusion, and, according to the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities’s document on criteria, would otherwise be relegated to an annex:

In the case of Catalan, a tri-lingual supplement (in Catalan, Spanish and English) is used, all of which must appear on an equal basis.

“The form is compact and easy to use, and any information that does not fit on four pages may, —as in other official documents— be included in an annex with the supplementary information (for example, with the translation into the co-official languages)”.¹⁷

Moreover, the language services in the Catalan universities, together with the former Catalan Ministry for Universities, Research and the Information Society (DURSI), have developed a joint project to translate officially recognised degrees into Catalan, in addition to the fields of study and corresponding professional qualifications. As for the names of the subjects in the curricula, it is logical for these to be determined by each university in all of the relevant

¹⁶ See REICHERT, S. and TAUCH, C. (2005) p. 33.

¹⁷ See CONSEJO DE COORDINACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA (2005), *Criteria...*, p. 1. Subsequent to this document, the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities did produce a tri-lingual form, where the three languages appeared as we have described here.

languages, given that the names used in different universities do not always coincide, even for core subjects and also despite the fact that the degree programme is the same.

The Spanish Royal Order accepts that universities located in the regional Autonomous Communities with their own co-official language may also issue diploma supplements in their own language.

Despite the fact that English is predominant, neither the abovementioned Decision no. 2241/2004/EC nor Royal Decree 1044/2003 make the use of English compulsory. The European ruling just says that the form is available in the official languages of the European Union. The Spanish Royal Order, on the other hand, is much more restrictive¹⁸ and in general envisages that the languages to be used are Spanish and “another official language of the European Union that the university shall determine”, although a following clause in the same section restricts this even more by entrusting the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities to approve “standard diploma supplement forms in the most commonly used official languages of the European Union”. As the European supplement — and the entire Bologna process itself— is a pan-European, and even world-wide, project, it is inappropriate and unnecessary, from the conceptual

point of view, to limit this to the languages of an organisation of reduced scope that is the European Union (in terms of Europe, it excludes, for example, the possibility of the use of a widely-used language like Russian, and outside of Europe, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese). Moreover, the idea of “most commonly used languages”, in spite of it being due to the commendable intention of choosing the maximum diffusion and comprehensiveness, which is the ultimate purpose of the European supplement, introduces a non-specific legal concept that will always be an inconvenience. Leaving aside the meaning of the use of language, it is easy to agree on the fact that Maltese, Estonian or Luxembourgeois, for example, do not belong to the category of most commonly used languages, although it is more difficult to say the same in the case of Polish or Dutch.¹⁹ On the other hand, an interpretation according to the use of language in relation to geographical scope could lead to the paradoxical exclusion of Portuguese, which is a relatively little used language in Europe but one that is used widely around the world. In short, the wording of this section of the Royal Decree is flagrantly inadequate and reveals the excess regulatory zest to which Spanish legislation frequently resorts. The problems do not stop here, however: three years have passed since the Royal Decree was passed yet the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities has still not implemented the task assigned to it, nor has it approved any form for the supplement in other languages, other than English, which predetermines that even now it cannot be issued in other languages, even though the universities are capable of doing so.²⁰ The Spanish Royal Decree does finally

¹⁸ See article 7.4 of Royal Decree 1044/2003, of 1 August, which is referred to on numerous occasions.

¹⁹ The Polish language is spoken by 44 million people, a similar number to that of Spanish speakers in Europe; 21 million people speak Dutch.

²⁰ It is surprising that the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities considers that it has completed the task of translating the supplement into different European languages with the translation just into English, as is expressed in section b of the abovementioned document on the standards. This diminishes the universities’ autonomy because it is the universities themselves that determine the European language that they wish to use, although they are not authorised to produce their own version. In order to surmount the Council’s inactivity, the Minister of Education and Science could make use of the second final provision of the Royal Order, which empowers the Minister to modify the format and forms of the EU diploma supplement that appear in the annexes.

accept however that universities located in the Autonomous Communities with their own co-official language may also issue diploma supplements in their own language.²¹

Up until this point, we have only dealt with the languages in which the supplement is issued. The other linguistic aspect involves the language or languages in which the academic activity, for which the European supplement is the documentary support, takes place. This aspect appears in section 2, which gives the information on the entire degree programme. In particular, section 2.5 is for the “language/s used in teaching and examinations”, and the Royal Decree 1044/2003 of 1 August adds to this that, where applicable, the percentages must be given for teaching in Spanish or the corresponding co-official language and other languages, provided that at least one subject has been taught in the language. Precise indication of such a percentage is very difficult.²² Moreover, given that it is information on the degree programme in general, it should be sufficient to give generic details that are common to all degree holders in each programme, irrespective of the training itinerary, which may lead to a certain linguistic diversity. On the other hand, the information on the language in which the holder has studied each subject is important for the holder as an individual, and this could be entered under “Observations” in section 4.3. This is also a way of recognising the effort of students who take more courses in third languages.

2.5 Formal aspects of the EU diploma supplement

In a document where so much information has to be filled out, the presentation and format are also very important. The supplements designed in the various countries which we have received information on use very different formats. For example, in regard to the way that language has been dealt with, there is a diversity of forms that extends from single language supplements to those that use more than one language, and different solutions are given as to the way of incorporating them. The design is also highly variable and some layouts are more schematic in their presentation of information whereas others are more text-based.

In addition to a printed edition, Decision no. 2241/2004/EC also envisages the possibility of the Europass documents in general being made available in digital format, although for computer use a distinction clearly needs to be made between documents to be filled out directly by the person concerned (above all the Europass CV, which should also be made available for completion on-line) and those to be filled out by an authorised body,²³ as in the case of the EU diploma supplement, which must be issued by the HEIs and, in Catalonia, the universities. No proposal is made regarding this aspect in Royal Decree 1044/2003 of 1 August and neither is there any mention of the term on-line.

²¹ A broad and strict interpretation of the expression “located in the Autonomous Communities with their own co-official language” should also enable this possibility to spread to the UNED (national distance learning university), with regard to its centres in Spain, even though this institution depends directly on the State, is based in Madrid and does not form part of the university system in Catalonia.

²² The lawmakers seem to be unfamiliar with Catalan universities in terms of both the partially flexible structure of curricula that —leaving elective credits to one side — include optional subjects in which all of the students in a programme may not necessarily coincide, and the variability of academic staff assigned to teaching activities, who have the free choice to select the language used in the classroom. There are also some universities that, with more than one group of students on the same degree programme, offer special itineraries in English. All of these factors may slightly alter the percentage figure that uses a language from one year to another or even in the different groups of the same academic year.

²³ In this case, all it requires in Annex VII of the Decision, “Information system”, is the use of an open system that ensures interoperability, as well as mentioning the need for the relevant legislation regarding personal data protection to be respected.

In the case of the printed version of the EU diploma supplement, on the other hand, the Spanish lawmakers do make certain specific requirements,²⁴ two being that the size of the paper must be UNE A4 and safety paper must be used. This requirement for safety paper has led to the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities establishing certain technical characteristics that we qualify as being *immoderate*;²⁵ in addition to increasing the cost of production, they make the process of issuing the EU diploma supplement inflexible. In our opinion, these requirements reveal

The EU diploma supplement can be conceived as a document that is easy for the student to obtain at low cost, which provides a lot of information on the student's learning and does away with the need for translations as it is issued at source in various languages.

a certain idea of what the European supplement should be, and regarding which there are (at least) two opposing points of view. From the pragmatic point of view, the EU diploma supplement is conceived as being a document that is easy for the student to obtain at low cost, it provides much more information than other documents normally used on the student's learning in a clear and reliable way, and it also does away with the need for

translations as it is issued at source in various languages. On the other hand, from what we could call the symbolic point of view, the EU diploma supplement is seen to be a kind of subspecies of degree qualification and, for this reason, should have many of the characteristics that are typical as such: covered with designs (with different coloured inks, watermarks, etc.), safety paper with characteristics that are applied in the manufacture of banknotes, etc., that can easily lead to the document ending up in a frame on the wall. Needless to say, we are of the opinion that the first of the two options is the more preferable, given that the EU diploma supplement must be a document that helps in the dynamic and flexible recognition of the skills, competences and qualifications acquired at different times throughout the professional and/or academic career of the person concerned and not one for merely static exhibition purposes. A metaphorical comparison is made above between the EU diploma supplement and the European currency, the euro, by referring to the possibilities of it facilitating academic exchange and the mobility of university graduates in a somewhat similar way to the effects of the euro on economic transactions between people in different European countries. We had absolutely no idea that the metaphor would become quite literal, to the point where, in order to issue an academic document like the EU diploma supplement, technology similar to that used for printing, for example, 50 and 200 euro banknotes, would be required.

Another aspect that reveals the regulatory nature of the ruling in the Royal Decree is the matter of which coats of arms and logos should appear.

²⁴ See article 7.2 of Royal Decree 1044/2003, of 1 August.

²⁵ The technical characteristics stipulated by the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities for the EU diploma supplement are expressed in the following way: "TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SECURITY MEDIUM: A4 format (folded); 138 gr/m²; highly resistant to wear, neutral pulp under UV light; invisible luminiscent yellow and blue fibrils, visible under UV light; technical gelatin finish on both sides; chemical reagents against the fraudulent modification of laser-printed wording; laminated with polyester for high resistance to wear and tear; high security demetallised hologram on the back (recommended)"

According to the Coordinating Council of Spanish Universities:

“Article 7.3 of the Royal Decree is very clear in pointing out the obligatory nature of the use of the coat of arms of Spain, and the optional nature of the logo of the European Union and the university’s coat of arms. The use of the Europass logo does not contravene the article, and its inclusion was accepted at the request of the National Europass Centre on 8 April 2005”.

This therefore establishes that at least four coats of arms and logos are to be included, namely, the coat of arms of Spain —which, aside from being compulsory, the Royal Decree also stipulates that it must be bigger than any other one—, the European Union logo, the Europass logo and that of the corresponding university. In our opinion, the only obligatory graphic element should be the university’s coat of arms. On the other hand, it is surprising that the inclusion of the logo of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya) is not envisaged, especially if one takes into account that, in accordance with the Catalan Universities Act (LUC), the twelve Catalan universities that make up the Catalan university system²⁶ were either set up or recognised by legislation passed by the Parliament of Catalonia. At all events, the number of coats of arms and symbols needs to be kept to a minimum in order to avoid confusion.

3. The diploma supplement and the recognition of university degree qualifications

3.1 The Lisbon agreement on the recognition of foreign qualifications, 1997

As stated on various occasions above, the EU diploma supplement does not itself confer any recognition of qualifications and skills and it merely serves as a comprehensible and intelligible documentary medium that facilitates their comparison. The process of European integration, and international globalisation as well, generates the necessity for the understanding and recognition in one country of the qualifications obtained in another. For this purpose, the Council of Europe promoted a Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications endorsed in Lisbon on 11 April 1997.²⁷ The Lisbon Convention is highly relevant to the EU diploma supplement as one of the prescriptions of the agreement is the adoption of the EU diploma supplement or another comparable document.²⁸

Unfortunately, on the threshold of the tenth anniversary of the Lisbon agreement, Spain has still not signed it. As can be seen in table 3, the only other countries that have not signed it are Andorra, Greece, Monaco and San Marino, states that, with the greatest of respect, can hardly be considered to be benchmarks for university competitiveness or excellence.²⁹

²⁶ See article 2 of Act 1/2003 on Catalan Universities, of 19 February. (Catalan Official Journal, DOGC n°3826, of 20/02/2003, in Catalan). Available at: http://www10.gencat.net/dursi/generadors/catala/universitats/recurs/doc/lei1_03_dogc.htm.

²⁷ The full name of the Lisbon agreement is “Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”. Lisbon, therefore, lends its name not just to a strategy or agenda with the aim of making Europe into the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world but also to an agreement that forms the basis for the principles of transparency pursued through the EU diploma supplement.

²⁸ In accordance with article IX.3: “The Parties shall promote, through the national information centres or otherwise, the use of the UNESCO/Council of Europe Diploma Supplement or any other comparable document by the higher education institutions of the Parties”.

²⁹ On 1 June 2005, María Jesús Sansegundo, the then Minister of Education and Science, on informing the Spanish Parliament (Congreso de Diputados) of the achievements that Spain had conveyed to the Bergen Summit, said the following: “It should be pointed out that the advances made since the last conference in Berlin in 2003 can be [clearly] appreciated. Spain has been able to make recent progress, as with the development of the diploma supplement, which graduates in Spain will be able to receive for the first time this year, 2005. Royal Decrees concerning undergraduate and postgraduate degrees were approved in January, as well as the formalities which are already well advanced for the forthcoming signing, finally, of the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of degrees”. See: Diary of the sessions of the Spanish Parliament (Congreso de Diputados). Plenary and Standing Committee. VIII Legislature, no. 96. Plenary session no. 91 held on Wednesday, 1 June 2005, p. 4834. Despite the Minister’s statement, the agreement has still not been signed although, according to representatives of the current Ministry of Education and Science who have been consulted, this could take place at the end of the year.

Table 3
Situation regarding the endorsement, ratification and entry into force of the Lisbon agreement on the recognition of foreign qualifications by the member states of the Council of Europe and other non-membre states.
a) Member States of the Council of Europe

States ³⁰	Signature	Ratification	Entry into force
Germany	11/4/1997		
Azerbaijan	11/4/1997	10/3/1998	1/2/1999
Bulgaria	11/4/1997	19/5/2000	1/7/2000
Croatia	11/4/1997	17/10/2002	1/12/2002
Denmark	11/4/1997	20/3/2003	1/5/2003
Slovakia	11/4/1997	13/7/1999	1/9/1999
Slovenia	11/4/1997	21/7/1999	1/9/1999
Estonia	11/4/1997	1/4/1998	1/2/1999
France	11/4/1997	4/10/1999	1/12/1999
Georgia	11/4/1997	13/10/1999	1/12/1999
Hungary	11/4/1997	4/2/2000	1/4/2000
Iceland	11/4/1997	21/3/2001	1/5/2001
Former Republic of Macedonia	11/4/1997	29/11/2002	1/1/2003
Latvia	11/4/1997	20/7/1999	1/9/1999
Lithuania	11/4/1997	17/12/1998	1/2/1999
Luxembourg	11/4/1997	4/10/2000	1/12/2000
Malta	11/4/1997	16/11/2005	1/1/2006
Norway	11/4/1997	29/4/1999	1/6/1999
Poland	11/4/1997	17/3/2004	1/5/2004
Portugal	11/4/1997	15/10/2001	1/12/2001
Czech Republic	11/4/1997	15/12/1999	1/2/2000
Rumania	11/4/1997	12/1/1999	1/3/1999
Sweden	11/4/1997	28/9/2001	1/11/2001
Ukraine	11/4/1997	14/4/2000	1/6/2000
Moldavia	6/5/1997	23/9/1999	1/11/1999
Austria	7/7/1997	3/2/1999	1/4/1999
Italy	24/7/1997	–	–
United Kingdom	7/11/1997	23/5/2003	1/7/2003
Finland	22/1/1998	21/1/2004	1/3/2004
Switzerland	24/3/1998	24/3/1998	1/2/1999
Cyprus	25/3/1998	21/11/2001	1/1/2002
Russia	7/5/1999	25/5/2000	1/7/2000
Albania	4/11/1999	6/3/2002	1/5/2002
Liechtenstein	–	1/2/2000	1/4/2000
Armenia	26/5/2000	7/1/2005	1/3/2005
Netherlands	14/5/2002	–	–
Bosnia and Herzegovina	17/7/2003	9/1/2004	1/3/2004
Servia*	3/3/2004	3/3/2004	1/5/2004
Ireland	8/3/2004	8/3/2004	1/5/2004
Turkey	1/12/2004	–	–
Belgium	7/3/2005	–	–
Andorra	–	–	–
Spain	–	–	–
Greece	–	–	–
Monaco	–	–	–
San Marino	–	–	–

* The dates of signature and ratification correspond to the union of Serbia and Montenegro.

Source: Treaty Office of the European Council. See: «<http://conventions.coe.int>»

b) Non-membre States of the Council of Europe

States ³⁰	Signature	Ratification	Entry into force
United States	11/4/1997	–	–
Kazakhstan	11/4/1997	7/10/1998	1/2/1999
Holy See	11/4/1997	28/2/2001	/4/2001
Canada	4/11/1997	–	–
Israel	24/11/1997	–	–
Australia	19/9/2000	22/11/2002	1/1/2003
Belarus	–	19/2/2002	1/4/2002
Montenegro *	3/3/2004	3/3/2004	6/6/2006
Kyrgyz Republic	–	9/3/2004	1/5/2004
Tajikistan	–	–	–

* The dates of signature and ratification correspond to the union of Serbia and Montenegro.

Source: Treaty Office of the European Council. See: «<http://conventions.coe.int>»

Total number of signatures not followed by ratifications: 8

Total number of ratifications/accessions: 42

The Lisbon agreement is based on the general principle of the reciprocal recognition of equivalent qualifications and is not overly demanding for countries where it is in force. In practice, the main effect that it produces is to transfer the burden of truth when a country where the agreement is applicable considers that a certain qualification invoked by the person concerned is not equivalent to any in its system. In other words, given an application for recognition, it is the public administration and not the applicant that must irrefutably demonstrate that the qualifications are in fact not equivalent due to substantial differences. The problem here clearly consists of determining precisely what is considered to be a “substantial difference” and when it is understood that these “substantial differences” occur. This is extremely difficult to put into objective terms and in the Catalan legal system there is no alternative other than to go to court.

In any case, the Lisbon agreement does not impose the automatic or indiscriminate recognition of qualifications, which—as many of us point out—is as it should be. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate for all regulation and supervision by the corresponding public administration to be removed from higher education, which in general is conceived as being a public good in the whole of Europe. As Moles critically states, in relation to the proposal for the so-called Bolkestein directive, assurance must be given to the specific treatment of higher education: “The proposal deals in the same way with all services, whether or not they are in the public interest or not. It does not take into account any particular requirements in terms of safety, health, the guarantee of admission or funding, diversity preservation or the non-appliance of the rules of competitiveness, which are essential in certain sectors. For example, it considers higher education to be an economic service that competes on the same level with other services”^{31, 32}.

³⁰ In order of the agreement being signed.

³¹ See MOLES, R. J. (2006), p. 189.

³² See also RODRIGUES DIAS, M.A. (2006).

3.2 The latest developments regarding the recognition of qualifications in Spain

Aside from the fact that the Lisbon Convention not been endorsed, it is appropriate to include here that, so far as the academic recognition of university degree programmes is concerned, several advances have been made, the most significant of which refer to foreign postgraduate degrees. The new regulatory scheme empowers the universities, through the figure of the Rector (Vice-Chancellor), to recognise a foreign postgraduate-level degree, namely, a Master's or PhD degree.³³

The new regulatory scheme in Spain empowers the universities, through the figure of the Rector (Vice-Chancellor), to recognise a foreign postgraduate-level degree, namely, a Master's or PhD degree.

The granting of this authority, in the form of an amendment passed in March 2005, is more coherent with the principles that inspire the new regulation of officially recognised postgraduate studies that introduced recognised Master's degrees. This breaks with one principle of the Spanish university regulatory system, which reserved for the Spanish State the exclusive jurisdiction over the recognition of recognised university degrees, although, in exchange, it does admit the possibility of the partial validation of a study programme by the universities, which could

become considerably more extensive (for example, a whole cycle of study programmes, although not a whole degree). From the Catalan point of view, in what is an academic issue like this, this is an appropriate option that, moreover, enhances the universities' autonomy. This new distribution of jurisdiction will also help to speed up the handling of the corresponding processes that have customarily undergone excessive delay. As for their effectiveness, one must bear in mind that the resolution adopted by a particular university is fully valid at the national level in Spain, which is a sign of trust in the universities' responsibility to exercise this authority. The progressive consolidation of the EU diploma supplement in different countries will undoubtedly provide more information for adopting resolutions by the vice-chancellors with maximum guarantees. Moreover, an exception is envisaged under the regulation for Master's degrees, as referred to in article 8.3 of Royal Decree 56/2005,³⁴ of 21 January, that is, in cases where, according to the prevailing regulations, the degree in question entitles the holder to undertake regulated professional activities.

4. Prospects for effective implementation in the university system in Catalonia

4.1 An EU diploma supplement for non-European degree programmes?

As is mentioned above in relation to the structure del EU diploma supplement, especially in section 4, the current regulations in Spain in relation to

³³ See articles 22b and 22c of Royal Decree 285/2004, of 20 February, modified by Royal Decree 309/2005, of 18 March.

³⁴ Royal Decree 56/2006, of January which regulates the postgraduate university studies (Spanish Official Bulletin, BOE n° 21, of 25/1/2005. Available from (in Spanish) <http://www.upf.edu/ari/doctorat/homologaci3/A09886-09891.pdf>, modified by Royal Decree 1509/2005, of 16 december (BOE n°. 303, of 20/1/2005), available from: <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2005/12/20/pdfs/A41455-41457.pdf>.

the European supplement do not correspond to degree programmes adapted to the approaches agreed to in the Bologna Declaration. Spain had still not defined the structure for degree programmes adapted to the EHEA in 2003, let alone now. According to the working paper published in September 2006 by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, the first undergraduate degree programmes in Spanish universities will only get under way in the 2008-2009 academic year.³⁵ This means that the EU diploma supplement that Catalan universities could issue at the present time is not for European degree programmes; seen from a different perspective, it could be said to be an “EU non-European diploma supplement”.

4.2 Operational difficulties

Implementation of the European diploma supplement is not without its difficulties in the initial stage, difficulties that are not exclusive to the Catalan system, given that the latest report from the EUA points to various different ones that are widespread in all countries:

“Frequent difficulties: the student record system doesn’t contain the necessary information, the national student data software has not yet been adjusted to “Bologna”, the diploma supplement requires a big IT effort because of the complexity of study itineraries, high costs - especially for translations”.³⁶

It is our view that the first difficulty mentioned is not especially relevant for Catalan universities, which do have the necessary student record systems. The others mentioned in the EUA report

are however causing headaches to those in charge of Catalan university institutions. In the first place, and with regard to adapting to the Bologna requirements, only the supplement form has been adopted —as we have repeatedly stated— for current degree programmes that are still not adapted to the EHEA. Moreover, the European supplement will undoubtedly require the development of a highly complex computer back-up system to gather all the information on students’ careers in an appropriate way: variable types of eligibility, which may determine different requirements (for example, according to the

The European supplement will undoubtedly require the development of a highly complex computer back-up system to gather all the information on students’ careers in an appropriate way.

qualifying degree programme for admission to second cycle, it may be compulsory to take certain complementary courses or none at all); credit validation and recognition incorporating qualifications obtained at the university of origin, especially in the event of student records being transferred, which does not usually occur on-line; adequate and complete information on courses taken in international exchange programmes, etc. Furthermore, although the Spanish Royal Decree does not mention it, the Europass documents project, including the EU diploma supplement, raises the issue of the appropriateness of it being

³⁵ See MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, MEC (2006) p.21 *La organización de las enseñanzas universitarias...* (2006), p. 21.

³⁶ See REICHERT, S. and TAUCH, C. (2005), p.33.

The EU diploma supplement that Catalan universities could issue at the present time is not for European degree programmes; seen from a different perspective, it could be said to be an “EU non-European diploma supplement”.

available in computer format. In the medium term, therefore, it will need to be assured that all the corresponding information in the European supplement can be generated in computer format and on-line. As far as translation costs are concerned, all the information in the document must be in the three languages. It will therefore be unavoidable, for example, for all of the versions of the subject names to appear in each curriculum and, while some universities have already anticipated this when incorporating new curricula, not all have done so yet. The cost will undoubtedly be higher in the initial stage when the EU diploma supplement is being set up although the prospects of structural changes on the immediate horizon may act as a disincentive to this being carried.

One final point is that, in spite of the fact that it is not a difficulty for the issuing of the type of supplements that we are referring to here, there is an increasing urgency to adopt appropriate measures to make the corresponding European supplement available for new officially recognised postgraduate studies that are already under way in the 2006-2007 academic year. The proposal by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science in the abovementioned working paper does include the proposal to issue the supplement although it

makes no specific mention of it in the timetable of anticipated measures. The first group of postgraduates to complete their studies under the new structure will do so in just a few months time in June 2007, by which time the structure will already fully incorporate the characteristics of the European Higher Education Area.

5. Conclusions

As is explained in section 4, the EU diploma supplement may be a very effective way of contextualising a person's academic results in a university degree programme as a whole. What the European supplement does not do is place the university institution within the context of the institutions of the country in question. By means of the European supplement, a person's achievements can be put into context and assessed in relation to the whole group of graduates of a discipline at the same institution. But who will link the results obtained in one institution in relation to other institutions offering similar programmes with the same or similar systems? This leads us to the notion of the ranking of institutions and study programmes, one aspect that in Catalonia is not very developed due to different reasons, one of which is the great susceptibility that this generates. As far as the author is concerned, the reliable ranking of institutions and study programmes is a necessity, provided that it is a guarantee of the public service of higher education. Citizens and, above all, the potential users of university education have the right to know which institutions are the most efficient and reach closer to excellence. The EU diploma supplement does not require this information to be included although it does envisage the possibility of additional information being entered in section 6. It would be particularly

relevant for this information to include the recognition and accreditation of the academic quality obtained by the institution or centre giving the studies, the awards and distinctions received by participating teaching staff, etc.

In spite of the abovementioned difficulties and other critical considerations regarding the way in which it has been adopted in Spain, we are firmly convinced of the interest and usefulness of the EU diploma supplement as an instrument for recognising the studies of university graduates. The EU diploma supplement represents an indubitable step forward, and Catalan universities need to be encouraged so they can in effect be ready to issue it as soon as possible, bearing in mind that it was set up more than three years ago (September 2003) and that certain proposals pointed to 2005 as being the date from which it should be issued in all countries.

The Bologna Process seeks to focus higher education on the students and their part in the educational process, expressed in particular as the outcomes of learning. It is therefore also highly relevant to take into consideration what the students themselves think about the EU diploma supplement.

The ESIB, for example, the organisation that brings together around fifty European students union bodies from thirty-seven countries, considers the EU diploma supplement to be a decisive element in the transparency and recognition of qualifications and calls for more firmness in its' implementation:

“In order for the Diploma Supplement to answer to the need to create transparency and contribute to recognition of qualifications and better employability, the system needs to be implemented more vigorously, and its use expanded. Genuine institutional commitment and information campaigning, also towards the labour market, are crucial. Co-operation in between the various actors needs to be further promoted as well as on the national level. Tools are needed to record and recognise life long learning”.³⁷

So when all is said and done, it all comes down, not to something to laugh about, but to the German, the Frenchman and the Catalan that were mentioned at the beginning (let alone the Rumanian, the Swiss, the Spaniard, the Egyptian, the Argentinean, the Chinaman, etc.) finding the maximum facilities for studying and working in Europe and all around the world.

³⁷ See ESIB, p. 3.

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