

# The role of the Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Center (NARIC) in Engineering

Philotheos G. Lokkas

Technological Educational Institute  
Larissa, Greece

**ABSTRACT:** One of the main concerns for a graduate or postgraduate student who has studied abroad, after their return back to Greece, is the recognition of their studies, which enables them to work professionally at home. Until recently in Greece, this procedure was realized by DIKATSA, a special center for this purpose. The procedure of recognition was simple in many cases, although there were others, which were troublesome and sometimes resulted either in a long delay or in a negative effect. The Greek Ministry of Education, in an effort to avoid the disadvantages of this system, decided to create a new Center. This is the so-called Hellenic NARIC, which is a part of a worldwide network, structured to cover recognition of academic titles awarded abroad. This paper presents the structure of the new system, along with the aim and its main properties and highlights the terms and conditions of correlation for the Faculties of Engineering.

## INTRODUCTION

The main principles of the new organization are presented below in a brief description from the Official Gazette of the Greek Democracy. Then a comparison of the Engineering Departments' curricula between Universities and Technological Educational Institutes, along with recent changes in Greek legislation concerning the professional rights is presented, in order to elevate the role of the Hellenic NARIC.

The author proceeded to this announcement taking advantage of his official participation to the managerial council of the organization [1].

## MAIN AIMS

The headquarters of the new Center (Organization), founded by *Act 3328/1<sup>st</sup> April 2005* [2] and known by the Greek acronyms DOATAP, is Athens. It is under supervision of the Greek Ministry of Education and aims at:

- Recognizing titles of academic studies, which have been awarded by equivalent Universities, Colleges or Technological Institutions of higher Education from abroad.
- Providing information relevant to the studies corresponding to that level of education offered both in Greece and abroad.

In order this task to be realized, the Center:

- a) Collects and works out information concerning the Greek Educational system mainly from Universities and Technological Institutions.
- b) Collects and works out information concerning the International and European higher educational system, monitors the evolutions that take place internationally in this area and informs the Ministry of Education, the Universities and the Technological Educational Institutes. Also consults the Ministry of Education about

the necessity of creating new Departments in Greece that already exist and operate abroad.

- c) Cooperates with associations, which aim at qualifying the educational quality.

## THE CONCEPT OF RECOGNITION

A recognition of studies is a certificate provided by the Center, which may concern either to "equivalence" or to "equivalence and correspondence" of the offered title. The recognition concerns Bachelors of Science and Arts, Masters and PhDs.

A University or Technological Institute of Education is considered as "recognized" when it has been characterized as one of equivalent order. This term holds if:

- The necessary projects for the particular area of science are incorporated in the syllabus in both lectures and examinations.
- The Educational Institution awards Bachelors, Masters and PhDs.
- More than half of the Institution's staff is a PhD holder.
- The awarded title leads to professional rights, which are recognized.
- The minimum duration of studies is a 3-year-period for undergraduate and 1 year for postgraduate program, provided the student has finished the second degree of education.

## TERMS OF A TITLE'S RECOGNITION

A title of studies from abroad is recognized either as "equivalent" or as "equivalent and corresponding".

1. The equivalence is recognized when:
  - a) The duration of studies, the lecturing procedure and the terms of evaluation and graduation meet the

minimum standards of the Greek Education at Universities and Technological Institutes. Excluded from the condition of the lecturing procedure are the 'Open Universities', the Institutes offering 'distance learning' and 'external degrees', provided they have special program studies for this purpose which are offered totally by the Institution itself, while the whole procedure of this type of program, the terms of evaluation and graduation are based on clear and irrefragable process.

- b) The total program of studies has been spent at equivalent Institutions while at least half of it has been realized at the Institution which provides the title.
2. Specifically, for a recognition of a title, coming from a 3-year-period of studies abroad, when, for a similar program of studies in Greece, a 4 or 5-year-period of studies is necessary, "equivalence" or "equivalence and correspondence" of the title is recognized only if the owner of the title is a Master holder. In this case, equivalence of Master is not recognized.
3. "Equivalence and correspondence" is recognized when, apart from the terms of equivalence, which have to be fulfilled, the candidate has been taught and examined successfully in all the basic projects of the corresponding program in Greece. The Center may demand a successful examination for a complementary number of projects at a home University. The complementary projects must not exceed six. This number may be increased up to ten, when the recognition concerns titles for which the corresponding home titles are obtained after a 5-year-period of studies. If the difference between the two programs of studies (home and abroad) is highly significant, then the recognition may concern only "equivalence", provided the terms of paragraph 1 are satisfied. The complementary projects are defined from a Special Committee (SC) of the Center. There is a sufficient number of SCs covering various scientific areas.
4. The relevant home Universities are obliged to accept for examination the candidates sent by the Center within the next 2 examination periods up to 10% of the total students of entrance that year.
5. The examinations may be conducted through the multiple-choice-answer system, while the evaluation might be realized electronically. The examination material is defined in advance and holds for one year.
6. The "equivalence and correspondence" of a title, for which complementary projects are required, is recognized after provision of proofs for successful examinations on the above projects.
7. Master and PhD degrees are recognized only as equivalent.

#### PROCEDURE OF RECOGNITION

1. The candidates apply for recognition of title either for "equivalence" or for "equivalence and correspondence". The special application form also constitutes a declaration for the precision of its context.
2. The President of the Center assigns the candidate's file to a specialist, who, having collected the necessary data, makes a suggestion. Then, if for this University, a previous recognition of similar titles has existed before,

the file goes to the President who signs the decision of recognition. If the President disagrees with the suggestion or there is no previous recognition, the decision is taken by the SC. If nevertheless there is no agreement in the SC, the issue goes to the Council of the Center. In the case that recognition of "equivalence and correspondence" is asked, even if recognition of equivalence has existed before, a suggestion for a supplementary number of examinations may be needed.

3. On the issued certificate, the type of which is defined by the Center, the characteristic title of "equivalence" or "equivalence and correspondence" is written on a well-shown position. There might be information about the duration of studies, their content etc. The Center keeps records for all the cases of recognitions.
4. The decisions along with the certificates, are issued within 60 days for the cases of "equivalence" and 90 days for the cases of "equivalence and correspondence" after submission of all relevant documents.

#### RECONSIDERATION OF RECOGNITION'S APPLICATION

The candidate, whose application has been rejected, may apply again within one year, presenting the reasons for reconsideration and submitting new documents. If the President or the SC keeps to be negative, the issue goes to a special reconsideration committee, consisted of other specialists. The decision is taken the soonest possible.

#### PROCEDURE OF INFORMATION

The Center is the state principal in charge to provide information on issues concerning the system and operation of education in Greece. It informs both people and Institutions.

The Center also informs any interested person in programs of studies abroad along with the recognition procedures. It aims to provide responsible and on time information to anyone interested in realizing studies abroad.

Information is provided through any convenient means of communication, in print or electronically.

Any decisions concerning recognitions or rejections of similar titles follow a procedure of publicity through any convenient way.

The work done by the Center is under validation every 3 years by an independent Committee of experts who are nominated from the teaching staff of the Universities.

#### UNIVERSITIES AND TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES (TEIs) IN GREECE

The curriculum of engineering departments at TEIs [3], like Electrical, Mechanical and Civil Engineering, emphasizes heavily the applied side of engineering technology.

Almost all modules in TEIs carry a heavy load of laboratory exercise and training. The modules are structured in such a way that the student will spend from 60% to 80% of the time in the laboratory and from 20% to 40% in the class (theory).

From the side of Universities, more theoretical engineering is taught at the corresponding departments, resulting to a theoretical training of their respective students.

As a result of this situation, the extreme Court of Greece, the Council of State, gave, for three categories of TEI's

postgraduates, namely for Structural Engineers, Civil Engineers for Infrastructure Works and Surveyors, an end to a long lasting pendency, concerning the professional rights. The Court limited the professional activities of the above categories only on the area of their specialization. A brief description [4] of these activities comprises:

Structural Engineers. Design concerning architectural structure, shell and masonry of structural works, supervision of buildings, building site management, design and improvement of technical characteristics, quality control, maintenance of structural materials etc.

Civil Engineers for Infrastructure Works. Supervision and construction of transportation and hydraulic works, organization of technical works, process of night soil, environmental protection, marine works etc and every kind of infrastructure works.

Surveyors. Land, town and street planning designs, cartographic, infrastructure and thematic maps, works relative to the agricultural area (irrigation, re-allotment of land), management of space information etc.

For a Civil Engineer, coming from a Technical University, a full scale of the above activities was and still is allowed.

Despite the drastic limitation on their professional rights, this decision provides, of course, a specialization character for each one of the above 3 categories of TEI's Depts. The high level of seismic activity for example, a better management of water resources and highways or a system of land allocation, are points of high interest in Greece.

This may be an additional reason why DOATAP demands a successful examination for a complementary number of projects, which are critical for Greek reality, in case of a title recognition coming from a 3-year-period of studies abroad.

## THE RECOGNITION STEPS IN PRACTICE

It is widely known that, unfortunately, there are many cases, where, organized teams undertake the responsibility to provide a normal certificate of title, for some hundreds or thousands of Euros.

People dealing with recognition on an international level have recently revealed such cases on the web. However, in any case, before the procedure of recognition takes place by DOATAP's specialists, the Dept. of candidate is checked on the list of the UNESCO World wide Universities, to ensure existence and legibility.

Simultaneously, the candidate's application form is followed by a series of letters (every form of facsimiles is excluded) between DOATAP and Dept's secretary to ensure that the candidate has spent at least half of his/her study period in the campus of the University.

In the meanwhile, a detailed check [5, 6] on the Dept's syllabus is realized. Then, if a minimum of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Greek Dept's syllabus is covered by the one abroad, the equivalence is certified.

Furthermore, if the candidate wishes to certify the "equivalence and correspondence" with respect to a specific Dept. of a Greek TEI or University, then the specialists of DOATAP may correspondingly demand from the candidate a successful examination of up to 6 or 10 complementary projects, otherwise only "equivalence" is recognized.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following are conclusions regarding the role of the new Hellenic NARIC in the procedure of a title recognition coming from general studies abroad and specially in Engineering.

1. The new Organization is a unified Center covering any possible case of recognition, working with uniform rules, applied equally to all cases and therefore ensuring justice to all candidates.
2. Due to internal co-operation between relevant committees, the result of recognition is faster than before and more reliable.
3. Following the International system of recognition in a worldwide scale, it has been proved to have a positive contribution for all Greeks studied abroad.
4. An improvement towards a more realistic application of the new Organization's duties should be the appointment of a sufficient number of qualified people, to ensure fast and fair decisions. To this direction has already worked the Ministry of Education, covering different specialties, on the top of those existed before by DIKATSA.

## REFERENCES

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