

## Public Conference on the Modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive

Brussels, 7 November 2011

The directive 2005/36, which came into force in 2009, sets rules for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications for up to 800 categories of regulated professions, accounting for around 4700 different professions and automatic recognition of professional qualifications for seven "sectoral" professions, including architects, dentists, doctors, midwives, nurses, pharmacists and vets. The aim is to allow a fully qualified professional from one EU country to practise anywhere across the EU.

Internal Market Commissioner Barnier reminded that amongst the 800 regulated professions, **43 % are health professionals** and 9% are teachers and social workers. He named three main concerns: a professional card on voluntary basis, e-gouvernance and language skills.

Members of European Parliament and particularly from the Internal Market and Consumer Protections Committee(IMCO) expressed in favour of a simple and transparent system for the recognition of professional qualifications, easy to access for professionals. On the main aspects of the revision which will be debated in the committee, they emphasized the **professional cards, the link with the Bologna process, the language questions**, and specific difficulties for regulated professions. They praised the Commission's exemplar work in this area, for its commitment to listen to all parties and to ensure that the professionals' experience on the ground will serve as basis for the proposal. On the European Parliament side, the IMCO committee will also continue to organise hearings with professional organisations.

### Impact of EU Educational Reforms

An independent consultant study evaluated the Professional Qualifications Directive against recent EU educational reforms, especially the **Bologna process**. It seems that the recognition process has not become quicker or easier. In order for the three cycle structure to provide advantages to doctors seeking professional recognition, it would have to be widely-established at member state level. This is not the case as medicine is excluded from the Bologna degree cycle in 16 out of 27 countries.

As to the impact of **ECTS** (European Credit Transfer System) it seems to have a greater potential to improve the recognition procedure by providing a consistent and comparable overview of subject content. Some doctors' stakeholders see a potential added value in automatic recognition based on ECTS credits rather than using teaching hours. Nevertheless, a slight majority of case study interviewees relating to the doctors' profession (58%) thought that the current system of **recognition based on harmonised minimum training** content provided greater confidence than a system based on learning outcomes without taking duration into account.

It was reported that there is little experience as to the 8-level qualification system **EQF** (European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning) in a recognition context, as only 10 countries referenced **NQF** (National Qualifications Framework) to the EQF.

## Conclusion

Globally all speakers and participants were very positive about the revision process of modernising the Recognitions of Professional Qualifications Directive, except for the British representative from the House of Lords, who feared that regulating bodies might be forced to accredit candidates who may not meet UK standards, to the fact that there is no way for prospective employers to check an applicant's disciplinary history thoroughly.

## Next steps:

MEPs will discuss a report that proposes speeding up procedures without compromising safety on 14 November 2011 ahead of the European Commission's revamp of the 2005 Professional Qualifications Directive later this year.

The report, drafted by British Conservative Emma McClarkin aims to give the EP's view on the rules. Among the main points are:

- rules must **ensure mobility while guaranteeing safety**. Protection of consumers and patient safety is vital
- cross-border mobility is seen as a way of enhancing economic growth and competition within the EU. The EP finds the relatively low number of mobile professionals worrying
- To address the problem of professionals who have been "struck off" continuing to practice "a **proactive alert mechanism**" should be established
- a **voluntary "professional card"**, certifying the academic and professional experience of the individual should be introduced
- guidelines should be introduced for the **approval process** and should set "reasonable" time limits
- the number of regulated professions should be cut to enhance mobility, one of the priorities in the Commission's plan to improve the functioning of the single market.