Report on the 13th Regional Committee Session and Its Follow-up Actions

Libing Wang, Chief of EISD, UNESCO Bangkok
One of the six regional conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications adopted through UNESCO in the late 1970s and early 1980s

First generation of regional recognition conventions

Regular Regional Committee Sessions are a mechanism to monitor the progress of the implementation of the Asia-Pacific regional convention

The 14th Regional Committee Session is under the 1983 Bangkok Convention with representatives from 21 state parties (Non-State-Parties are invited as observers)
# The 1983 Bangkok Convention

Signatories of State Parties to the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 16 December 1983. (As of 1 April 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Date of deposit of instrument</th>
<th>Type of instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 China</td>
<td>25/09/1984</td>
<td>Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Australia</td>
<td>23/09/1985</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sri Lanka</td>
<td>10/01/1986</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Turkey</td>
<td>28/04/1988</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Democratic People’s Republic of Korea</td>
<td>26/04/1989</td>
<td>Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Republic of Korea</td>
<td>29/08/1989</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Nepal</td>
<td>02/11/1989</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Maldives</td>
<td>14/05/1990</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Russian Federation</td>
<td>16/11/1990</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Mongolia</td>
<td>19/10/1991</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Tajikistan</td>
<td>28/08/1993</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Armenia</td>
<td>05/09/1993</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Azerbaijan</td>
<td>24/04/1995</td>
<td>Accession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Holy See</td>
<td>10/07/1995</td>
<td>Accession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>07/11/1995</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Turkmenistan</td>
<td>04/06/1996</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Kazakhstan</td>
<td>14/03/1997</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 India</td>
<td>02/08/2000</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
<td>02/01/2003</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Philippines</td>
<td>26/11/2003</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Indonesia</td>
<td>30/01/2008</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)This Convention entered into force on 23 October 1985. It subsequently entered into force for each State one month after the date of deposit of that State’s instrument, except in cases of notifications of succession, where the entry into force occurred on the date on which the State assumed responsibility for conducting its international relations.
The 2011 Tokyo Convention

- One of the second generation regional recognition conventions (i.e. 1997 Lisbon Convention, 2011 Tokyo Convention, 2014 Addis Convention)
- Adopted in November 2011 in Tokyo, Japan
- The amendments were in response to the significant changes in past decades, including:
  - exponential growth of private and public providers in higher education
  - increased cross-border mobility
  - growth of ICT and qualifications earned through ODL programmes
  - a greater focus on quality assurance, learning outcomes, etc.
The 2011 Tokyo Convention

- **Signed** by 8 member states: Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Republic of Korea, Timor Leste, and Turkey, subject to later ratification.

- **Also signed** by the Holy See.

- **Ratification** by five member states is required for the revised convention to enter into force.

- **A new Regional Committee** will maintain links to the Regional Committee of the 1983 Bangkok Convention.
As of August 2016, **Australia** (2014), **China** (2014), and **New Zealand** (2016) have ratified the 2011 Tokyo Convention. Ratification by two more Member States is required to bring the new Convention into force.
Main features of the 2011 Tokyo Convention

☑ Ensure **competent recognition authorities** implement the Convention

☑ Basic principles related to the assessment of qualifications: **transparent, coherent, reliable, fair, timely and non-discriminatory**

☑ Assessment shall focus on knowledge and skills achieved (e.g. based on **learning outcomes**)

☑ Decision made shall be based on the information available. Countries and HEIs need to provide clear and relevant information (**information-based comparison**)
Main features of the 2011 Tokyo Convention

- Recognition for giving access to higher education between parties shall be given, unless **substantial difference** can be shown.

- Qualifications obtained from **non-traditional modes** which allow for access to higher education in one party should be assessed in a fair manner by other parties (optional).

- Countries still have the right to make decisions within their own constitutional and regulatory framework (general requirements/specific requirements/language proficiency, etc.)
Main features of the 2011 Tokyo Convention

- Each party should develop procedures for the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situation within its constitutional, legal, and regulatory framework.

- Requires each Party to provide relevant information on their national higher education system and qualifications, as well as take adequate measures to develop and maintain a national information centre (NIC).
Any State may declare that it reserves the right not to apply, in whole or in part, one or more of the following articles:

- Article IV.7 and VI.3: **Qualifications obtained through non-traditional modes**;
- Articles V.1, V.2 and V.3: **Recognition of partial studies**;
- Article VIII.4: Promoting the use of the **UNESCO Diploma Supplement** or any other comparable qualification supplement; and the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education.
Proposals from the 13th Regional Committee Session

- Held in August 2014 in Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Member States called on UNESCO to provide technical guidance on ratification procedures and, more broadly, to help raise awareness about the strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific regional conventions
Proposals from the 13th Regional Committee Session

- Asia-Pacific National Information Centre Listserv was proposed by representatives of Australia
- Developing Guidelines on National Qualifications Framework was proposed by UNESCO Bangkok
- Possible collaboration with European ENIC-NARIC Centres was proposed by NARIC representatives

Suggestions made:

- Potential use/strengthening of Asia-Pacific Academic Recognition Network (APARNET) as an alternative to new listserv
- Promoting UNESCO portal on Higher Education Information
- Developing a toolkit on NQF instead of guidelines
New education strategy on normative instruments

At the request of the UNESCO Executive Board, five key inter-related dimensions support a new strategy on standard-setting instruments (2015):

- **Visibility** – Improve communication on normative instruments, intensify awareness-raising, and promote more focused information-sharing
- **Implementation** – Strengthen technical support, capacity-building and resource mobilization
- **Monitoring** – Strengthen existing mechanisms, develop focused activities and foster synergies between stakeholders
- **Cooperation** – Establish and strengthen more efficient channels promoting knowledge-sharing, peer-learning and collaboration
- **Ratification** – Identify difficulties and challenges faced by Member States and offer tailored assistance

Source: Strategy on standard-setting instruments in the field of education (2015-2021)
A Regional Capacity Building Workshop (October 2015) supported the five inter-related dimensions from the strategy.

Interactive sessions:
A junior staffer from Kazakhstan leading a focus group on the recognition of partial studies.
Actions since the 13th Regional Committee Session

Visibility

- UNESCO hosted a highly visible Regional Capacity Building Workshop in October 2015, which over 20 Member States attended.

- UNESCO Bangkok also sent regular communications about capacity building opportunities and circulated news items such as the development of new policy advocacy materials or new ratifications.

- In preparation for the 14th Session, an announcement, letter of invitation and Concept Note were sent to all Member States in Asia and the Pacific.
Implementation strategy

- Building national capacity through integrating quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, and recognition

Source: Revised model based on Campbell-Dorning, UNESCO Bangkok Regional Capacity Building Workshop on the 2011 Tokyo Convention (October, 2015)
Implementation strategy

Toward harmonization-based academic recognition

- Common QA Reference Framework
- Reduce Substantial Differences
- Equivalency Arrangements
- NICs, RCSs, Regional Workshops, HE Portal, Diploma Supplement, etc.

Harmonization
Compatibility
Comparability
Transparency
Actions since the 13th Regional Committee Session

Monitoring

- UNESCO Bangkok collected unofficial reports during the October 2015 capacity building workshop.
- In preparation for the 14th Session, a new survey instrument was developed based on input from UNESCO Paris to collect country reports and monitor ratification and implementation.
- UNESCO Bangkok’s efforts were recognized in a regional and global evaluation, which was published online in June 2016. (http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002452/245223E.pdf)
Enhancing cooperation

UNESCO Bangkok took part in two events in Europe to enhance inter-regional cooperation and experience sharing

- The 7th Meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, 28 February to 1 March 2016 in Paris, France
- The 23rd Joint Annual Meeting of ENIC and NARIC Networks from 18-22 June 2016 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Actions since the 13th Regional Committee Session

Promoting ratification

- Provided technical support for national consultations and capacity building (Cambodia, Malaysia, Fiji)
- Hosted a Regional Capacity Building Workshop on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Asia and the Pacific (October 2015).
- Sent personalized advocacy letters to four Member States on behalf of the UNESCO Bangkok Director
- Developed an Informal Note to explain the benefits and obligations of the 2011 Tokyo Convention
UNESCO has set ambitious goals for the recognition conventions for the next several years, both at the regional and global levels. Making significant progress towards these goals will require overcoming a number of challenges both within and outside UNESCO, and providing increased and sustained support to Member States in the areas UNESCO is already engaged in, such as capacity building, advocacy, and exchanging knowledge.
Effective partnerships will be key in all these areas. UNESCO is already applying some good practices and approaches, but there are also opportunities such as broadening capacity building resources, developing specific materials to support Member States with advocacy, making meetings more interactive etc.
Thank you very much for your attention