

## Academic recognition within the European community

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# Academic Recognition within the European Community

with special reference to agricultural studies in countries  
bordering the Mediterranean and in the  
Federal Republic of Germany

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*Having worked for some 15 years in the field of academic and professional recognition, both in national and international positions, I will try to give you a short overview of the facts, problems and trends in academic recognition within the European Community (EC). It is difficult to do this in a comprehensive fashion because of the complexity of the situation and the diverse regulations within the EC Member States. When giving examples, I will often refer to the situation in the Federal Republic of Germany, whose system I know best. I will try to acquaint you with the situation by starting first with large scale recognition arrangements and then proceed to individual problems which have to be dealt with on a institutional level or by the individual student or graduate. I will try to make some recommendations for facilitating the recognition of ICAMAS post-graduate specialization diplomas (DSPU), master's and prospective doctorate degrees. But before going into details, let us first define some key terms.*

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## I - Definitions

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**Academic recognition** is the recognition of higher education entrance qualifications, study periods, intermediate and final qualifications which takes place inside higher education institutions. It is directed to starting or continuing studies.

**Professional recognition** is the recognition of higher education qualifications for the purpose of beginning professional activities. "Professional recognition" and "vocational recognition" are often used as describing the same kind of recognition. In this paper, however, "professional recognition" is generally used in the context of academic professions, whereas "vocational recognition" is related to non-academic vocations.

*Effectus academicus* is the effect that completed higher education studies or diplomas and degrees have when beginning or continuing studies.

*Effectus civilis* is the effect that completed higher education studies or diplomas and degrees have when beginning or practicing a profession.

**Unilateral recognition** decisions are taken by one party only, by a higher education institution or a state, and they regulate the *a priori* general recognition of one special qualification or a number of qualifications from another institution or state on a formal basis which might be a law or a decision. Before taking a unilateral recognition decision, the institution or the state will normally have conducted a detailed examination of the foreign qualification and will have stated the full equivalence of the foreign qualification. Unilateral recognition decisions are normally related to only one qualification or a few of them and thus have very limited effect on the overall academic recognition situation of the states or institutions.

**Bilateral recognition** arrangements are taken by two parties, higher education institutions or states. Their content, legal form, procedure of negotiation and scope of regulation are normally comparable to that described for unilateral recognition decisions. The difference is that the bilateral arrangement goes in two directions and thus doubles the effect on the overall academic recognition situation of the states or institutions as compared to unilateral recognition decisions.

Multilateral academic recognition conventions go several steps further and regulate the recognition of one qualification or a group of them among a group of institutions or states. These conventions are political instruments, and their success depends on their legal enforcement. If the basis for legal enforcement is weak, the success of these conventions largely depends on the goodwill of the member states or institutions.

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## II - EC member countries and academic recognition at the EC level

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It should first be stressed that the higher education institutions of the EC Member Countries possess a large network of agreements with other higher education institutions inside and outside the Community which often contain regulations on academic recognition aspects. In a few Member Countries, these inter-institutional agreements have been collected systematically by central institutions; in other Member Countries this has not been done. The collection and systematic analysis of recognition arrangements among higher education institutions within the Community would be a time-consuming but rewarding task for the future.

Research on recognition of study abroad within the Joint Study Programmes (2) which are supported by the Commission of the European Communities was recently carried out and the results have been published in English (3), French and German.

The unilateral decisions, bilateral agreements and multilateral conventions on the recognition of higher education entrance, intermediate and final qualifications in force in EC Member States are summarized in the following paragraphs (see also overview in Table 1).

### 2.1. Unilateral decisions and bilateral conventions

Several bilateral conventions and unilateral decisions between EC Member States govern higher education entrance qualifications, higher education courses and intermediate qualifications and higher education final qualifications. It should be clarified, however, that in the event that bilateral conventions and unilateral decisions do not exist, this by no means should be taken to mean that certificates, diplomas and degrees of the individual EC Member States and their respective universities are not recognized in the remaining Member States. Rather, it may mean that:

a) any given EC Member State or its universities implement(s) multilateral conventions as described in sections 2.2., or that;

b) an EC Member State or its universities generally accept(s) the qualifications from other States, or that;

c) an EC Member State or its universities individually assess(es) the qualifications, which can lead to acceptance, restricted acceptance or refusal of the qualification.

The majority of the bilateral conventions and unilateral decisions refer to higher education entrance qualifications. Relatively few refer to higher education courses and intermediate qualifications, more refer to higher education final qualifications. For instance, there are a number of conventions and decisions in force which govern recognition of higher education final qualifications from EC Member Countries. Whereas Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands have many relevant recognition acts, Greece, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom do not have any state decisions or agreements in this area. The situation for Portugal and Spain has yet to be clarified.

As for bilateral agreements and unilateral decisions on the equivalence of periods of study and diplomas leading to admission to universities, the situation is fairly similar to the repartition described above for higher education final qualifications.

It has been argued that unilateral and bilateral state arrangements on academic recognition are not sufficiently efficient for the solution of large scale recognition and student mobility problems within the Community. This is partially true because many of the agreements are fairly restricted in scope, dealing with, e.g. one course of study or diploma or with a few study subjects only.

There are, however, other examples such as the Dutch-German equivalence treaty of 1983 which deals in a fairly general form with the recognition of virtually all studies taken at universities in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands. The equivalence treaty does, by the

way, reflect the recognition procedures which had been largely practiced by the competent authorities of these two Member Countries before the agreement was established. A similar equivalence treaty between Germany and Italy is nearing completion.

State recognition agreements are like stones in a mosaic: they are generally small in themselves, but many of them help to establish a picture. If multilateral and inter-institutional recognition arrangements are added, the situation at the Community level can be seen even more positively.

## 2.2. Multilateral Conventions

All Member States of the European Community are also Member States of the Council of Europe and UNESCO (4). Both the Council of Europe and UNESCO created multilateral conventions covering:

(a) the equivalence of diplomas leading to admission to universities,

(b) the equivalence of periods of university study and

(c) the academic recognition of university qualifications.

The recognition of foreign certificates, diplomas or degrees to qualify for the practice of a profession - an item which is also contained in the UNESCO conventions - is not directly related to the purpose of this paper. However, this form of academic recognition for professional purposes is the only aspect among those mentioned for the multilateral conventions in which the European Community has also been active so far (5).

Whereas the Council of Europe conventions covering fields (a) to (c) above date from 1953, 1956 and 1959 respectively, the UNESCO conventions covering these three and the professional field are much more recent. They were adopted in 1976 (for the Arab and European states bordering on the Mediterranean) and in 1979 (for the states belonging to the European region). Whereas the Council of Europe conventions cited above are in force for all or

nearly all Member States of the European Community, the UNESCO conventions were signed by all relevant EC Member States, but they were ratified by only a portion of them.

**Table 1** shows the multilateral conventions (Council of Europe conventions and UNESCO conventions) which are in force in EC Member countries. It can be seen that the three Council of Europe conventions governing equivalence matters are in force for all or virtually all Member Countries of the Community. The first mentioned Council of Europe convention on the equivalence of diplomas leading to admission to universities has proven its efficiency, whereas the two other Council of Europe conventions have proven very limited in their practical value; the first one, because it is limited to the field of modern languages, the second one, because the main restriction is the withholding of recognition in cases where the subjects of the foreign examination do not include all subjects for the similar home examination.

The UNESCO convention on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees concerning higher education in the states belonging to the Europe region includes very far-reaching rules regarding higher education entrance, intermediate and final qualifications, both academically and professionally. This convention is, however, in force only for Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Steps for the ratification procedure are currently being taken in Belgium, and it is not excluded that the Federal Republic of Germany will also take similar steps in the near future.

According to many educationalists, the UNESCO convention related to the Europe region - which aims to promote recognition in East and West European countries, in Canada and the USA - is purely a political measure without any practical value. This criticism may be partially correct as far as the practical results up to now are concerned. However, the implementation of this convention has been carried forward considerably by UNESCO and some of the convention's member countries recently, and further progress might need more time. Also, this convention may have an indirect influence on bilateral recognition negotiations as well as on multilateral

negotiations, for example within the European Community.

The plan of UNESCO is to get the conventions functioning within the different regions and later to interconnect them. This plan would also link the European region to the Arab and European states bordering on the Mediterranean. If the UNESCO plans would function in the future, the recognition of higher education entrance qualifications, studies, intermediate and final diplomas in agriculture - as in all other subjects - in all member countries of UNESCO in this area would no longer be a problem, neither academically nor professionally. But still, we are very far from achieving this.

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### III - Selected examples of state and university recognition

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Let us turn from large scale recognition arrangements to look at some actual cases, and select examples related to the concerns of ICAMAS. Since the situation of recognition of foreign studies and degrees is different in all EC Member Countries, it would take us too long to review the situation in all of them. So, to illustrate, let us take the example of a young man with an Egyptian father and a German mother who has completed his university studies in agriculture at the University of Cairo with a bachelor's and a master's degree. He travels to the Federal Republic of Germany and checks into the situation concerning the professional and academic recognition of his degrees in Germany.

#### 3.1. State Recognition of Degrees

In order to receive permission to use his degrees in conjunction with his name (as we say in Germany), this young man has to make an application to have his case reviewed in the German *Land* (province) where he resides. The Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Science of this *Land* will carefully check the courses of study and the degrees. If the degrees are found to be equivalent to the corresponding German degree, the Egyptian will receive written permission from the Ministry to use them as the corresponding German degrees (e.g. *Diplom - Agrarin-*

*genieur/Agypten*). If the degrees are not found to be equivalent to the corresponding German degrees, the Ministry will stipulate the following use: Bachelor of Science in Agriculture/University of Cairo and Master of Science in Agriculture/University of Cairo.

### 3.2. State Recognition of the Title Engineer

German engineering laws stipulate that nobody can work as an engineer unless he has a state engineering permit. In order to receive this document, the country authorities will check the content of the Egyptian degrees to determine the extent to which they are equivalent to a German engineering degree. If they are, a state engineering document (*Ingenieururkunde*) will be issued, and the Egyptian may then seek a job in his profession in Germany. If the authorities decide the degree is not equivalent, he may receive either a lower scale state permit (e.g. as a technician) or he may be asked to supplement his studies to obtain a German engineering degree as well as an *Ingenieururkunde*.

### 3.3. Professional Recognition

If the Egyptian wants to take up a job within the German civil service, the public employer will ask for the *Ingenieururkunde* and will examine the level of the engineering qualification. Without these qualifications, the person may not work as an engineer in the German public services. A private employer also has to make sure that an *Ingenieururkunde* has been acquired, before employing the Egyptian in an engineering position. The same holds for universities, if the Egyptian wants to work there as an engineer.

### 3.4. Academic Recognition

If the Egyptian wants to continue his studies at a German university to pursue a doctorate, the university will carefully check his credentials in order to find out about the academic equivalence of the degrees. If the master's degree is equivalent to a German *Diplom*, the person may immediately embark upon doctoral studies. If the university is not clear about the level of the degree, it may request to look at the thesis and/or test the actual level of the applicant's knowledge. If this is found

to be satisfactory, the person may begin doctoral studies. If the check reveals gaps or the university decides against granting equivalence, the Egyptian will be required to take additional studies and examinations before obtaining permission to proceed to doctoral studies.

### 3.5. Expert Advice for the State and Universities

German state institutions and universities, when dealing with foreign credentials, may consult the "Central Office for Foreign Education" in Bonn. This office is one of the "National Academic Recognition Information Centres" (NARICs) cooperating at the EC, Council of Europe and UNESCO levels.

The final decision on the recognition of foreign credentials - in Germany - is always made by the relevant state authorities, the universities and the employers.

The size and tasks of the NARICs within the EC are different. The size varies from a few to more than 30 persons, some NARICs being part of the national Ministries of Education, others of institutions outside the Ministries. Some NARICs make decisions on the academic recognition of foreign studies and degrees, others furnish an opinion but leave the decision to the competent authorities. Some NARICs concentrate on academic recognition, others also decide or advise on professional recognition matters.

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## IV - Academic recognition of agricultural studies and degrees from ICAMAS member countries bordering on the Mediterranean (selected examples)

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Although in one or another Member Country of the European Community a state or a central agency may cooperate in the decision or decide on the academic recognition of foreign studies - in this case, agricultural studies from countries bordering on the Mediterranean - in most cases the decision on academic recognition will be taken

by the university itself. Let us again consider the example of the Federal Republic of Germany, where academic recognition of agricultural studies from abroad is the sole responsibility of universities.

In order to get a quick overview, **Table 2**, below, has been constructed to show tendencies of German universities to grant academic recognition of university entrance qualifications and study periods in agricultural studies, first and second university degrees, to the best of our knowledge. It must be clearly pointed out that the German universities are free to evaluate foreign credentials, and that one university may evaluate the same credential differently in comparison to another. A final and binding decision will be taken by the university after the student's file has been examined.

**Portugal:** The Portuguese university entrance qualification is recognized by the German universities (Portugal as well as Germany are Member States of the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities - as are, among others, Spain, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Malta and Cyprus). German universities will tend to recognize Portuguese study periods up to the first degree, if the contents are acceptable, and to recognize first degrees at Portuguese universities as being formally equivalent to first university degrees at German institutions.

**Syria:** Syrian university entrance qualifications are not recognized by German universities. They are recognized only in conjunction with two years of additional university studies in Syria or if (an additional preparatory course and) an examination at the level of the German *Abitur* have been successfully completed. If the level and contents are deemed acceptable, German universities will recognize Syrian study periods up to the first degree. First Syrian degrees will not be recognized as being equivalent to German first university degrees, but some of the Syrian studies will normally be recognized. Second Syrian university degrees, however, will be given partial or conditional recognition as being equivalent to a first German university degree.

**Algeria:** The Algerian university entrance qualification is not recognized by German universities. It is recognized only in conjunction with one year of additional university studies in Algeria or if (an additional preparatory course and) an examination at the level of the German *Abitur* have been successfully passed. If the level and contents are acceptable, German universities will recognize Algerian study periods up to the diploma. The diploma itself, which takes five years of university studies in Algeria, will - according to the evaluation of the German university - probably be recognized either as not being equivalent to a German first agricultural university degree (but some or even a larger part of the Algerian studies will be recognized) or as being partially or conditionally equivalent (after a check of detailed information, perhaps after checking the actual knowledge of the diploma holder, equivalence may be granted; or further studies may be asked for at the German university).

When looking at **Table 2**, it may be seen that for German universities recognition arrangements for EC Member Countries and those countries covered by the relevant Council of Europe conventions are comparatively smooth. To our knowledge, similar smooth recognition arrangements exist within ICAMAS Member Countries which are equally EC Member Countries.

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### **V - Problems connected with the academic recognition of ICAMAS degrees and diplomas by universities in EC member states**

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Let us exclude from the consideration of this section the "ICAMAS training sessions of short cycles" lasting less than nine months which are sanctioned by a "certificate of participation". Let us rather concentrate on:

a) the "cycles of specialization" over a period of one academic year (nine months) sanctioned by the "Post-graduate Specialization Diploma" ("*Diplôme de Spécialisation Post-universitaire*", "D.S.P.U.") and

b) the "cycles of advanced training (or master's cycle)" lasting over a period equivalent to two academic years, sanctioned by the "Advanced Studies Diploma of the ICAMAS - Master" ("*Diplôme de Hautes Etudes du CIHEAM - Master*").

The entrance qualification for these courses is the diploma of the home country normally required to begin doctoral studies (minimum: baccalaureat plus four years of university studies).

The four ICAMAS institutions which offer these two diplomas and degrees (the Mediterranean Agronomic Institutes (MAI) in Bari, Italy; Montpellier, France; Saragossa, Spain; and Chania, Greece) are not part of the respective national higher education systems but they are ICAMAS institutions and depend entirely on that organization for their academic validity. ICAMAS is widely recognized by its member countries and promoted by international organizations such as the EC, CE and OECD. But the state recognition and international promotion of ICAMAS itself does not automatically imply the (professional and) academic recognition of diplomas and degrees of Mediterranean Agronomic Institutes (MAIs).

When a D.S.P.U. or master's degree holder of one of the four MAIs applies to a university within an EC Member State, this university is likely to check very carefully into the legal status of the MAI and into the contents of the studies. The university will then probably decide either on a legal or a flexible approach. The legal approach would hold that the MAI is not on the list of recognized European higher education institutions and that studies and diplomas of MAIs could therefore not be recognized. However, in this case the basic degree of the home country of the applicant would be considered for recognition. The flexible approach would be to consider solely the scientific quality of the MAI courses and diplomas or degrees and - with or without additional examination - grant either partial (because of the often high specialization of MAI studies) or even full recognition. At least in universities in EC countries, I would predict that the legal approach would prevail. This holds for academic as well as for professional recognition by the relevant authorities of MAI diplomas and degrees.

Needless to say, MAI studies, diplomas and degrees are not covered by the bi- and multilateral state conventions mentioned in Section 3. There have been probably a number of difficulties also connected with the bi- and multilateral university agreements within and outside the state of residence of the MAI, and these are likely to continue.

### 5.1. Recommendations for overcoming difficulties.

In the end, academic quality is always convincing. The MAIs offer courses of study and diplomas and degrees of high quality in needed specializations which are often not offered by other institutions. Thus, MAIs fulfill an important complementary role which should be honoured by smooth professional and academic recognition arrangements.

As far as professional recognition of MAI degrees and diplomas is concerned, there seem to be promising developments in a number of states inside and outside the ICAMAS member countries. With a growing reputation, the MAIs will continue to receive bright graduates and professionals, which are sent to them by universities, government agencies and employers and who, after graduation at the MAIs, will likely have few recognition problems. Other MAI diploma and degree holders in future may also have to convince their prospective employers of the value of their studies, and they should do this in all openness producing all required evidence. The MAI institutes could help in these endeavours by providing accurate information including "to whom it may concern" documents in the official language of the relevant country, to provide details on the studies completed by the individual diploma or degree holder and specify the situation for equivalence with regard to the national diplomas and degrees of the state.

The same information policy could be used in improving the overall situation of academic recognition of MAI diplomas and degrees at universities inside and outside ICAMAS member countries. This information policy could be used in a double way. First, in providing this information to the MAI graduate or to the university, where

the person wishes to continue studies. Second, by generally notifying all of those agricultural departments or faculties where diploma and degree holders of MAIs are likely to continue their studies. It might also be considered to invite representatives of those agricultural faculties to one of the MAIs and to organize information seminars. Considering the positive experience of universities and agencies dealing with recognition matters to date in the EC, the following additional measures might also be considered in order to improve the recognition of MAI credentials:

- nomination of a MAI staff member to deal especially with recognition matters,
- cooperation and continuous information exchange between the MAIs concerning recognition questions,
- editing a common newsletter which deals with questions of teaching and research, and also with recognition matters,
- invitation of key outside persons with responsibilities for recognition matters for short study visits,
- joint study programmes which contain recognition agreements with neighbouring universities or universities with similar specializations abroad (development of joint or double diplomas and degrees could be considered within these arrangements),
- twinning arrangements of MAIs and other universities incorporating recognition arrangements, perhaps even with the European University in Italy (agricultural economics, economics).

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## VI - Concluding remarks

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This paper attempted to provide an overview of the fairly complicated situation surrounding recognition matters at both the national level and EC level. In so doing, professional recognition questions have been touched upon, but the field of academic recognition has been in the foreground. Examples have been provided about the extent of

recognition likely to be granted for agricultural studies which have taken place in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and several difficulties which might arise to ICAMAS diploma and degree holders in EC member countries have been highlighted, as well as possible or at least conceivable ways to alleviate or overcome these difficulties.

I think that an improved recognition of ICAMAS and its institutes at national levels and a better promotion at international levels should be followed by a higher degree of professional and academic recognition of MAI studies and diplomas and degrees.

It will not be easy to obtain this; and I have pointed this out. But, if I have helped you achieve your objectives with the information I have given you, I will feel satisfied.

## Notes

(1) The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Office for Cooperation in Education, the Commission of the European Communities or the National Academic Recognition Information Centres within the Member Countries of the European Community.

(2) Joint study programmes are arrangements between higher education institutions in different countries which provide for common studies, common teaching or common curricula. Recognition arrangements within these Joint Study Programmes are one of the conditions for support by the CEC. Nearly 600 Joint Study Programmes involving more than 700 higher education institutions within the EC have been promoted by the CEC between 1976 and 1986, plus some other 650 grants for the preparation of Joint Study Programmes.

(3) DALICHOW F., TEICHLER U. (1986): Recognition of Study Abroad in the European Community, Document, Higher Education in the European Community, CEC (Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the EC, 1986).

(4) The United Kingdom withdrew from UNESCO in December 1985.

(5) Council Directives: medicine (1975), dentistry (1978), veterinary medicine (1978), architecture (1985), pharmacy (1985). A Proposal for a Council Directive on a General System

for the Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas (submitted to the Council by the Commission), COM(85) 355 final, 22 July 1985.

## Annex

## Tables

**Conventions and agreements in force between member states and  
between member states and third countries**

Country	A. Council of Europe conventions			B. UNESCO conventions	
	1. Admission to Univ. (1)	2. Periods of study (2)	3. Univ. qualification (3)	4. Europe Region (4)	5. Mediterranean (5)
B	X	X	X	Z	NA
D	X	X	X	Z	NA
DK	X	X	X	Y,X	NA
F	X	X	X	Z	Z
F	X	X		Z	Z
I	X	X	X	Y,X	Y,X
IRL	X	X	X	Z	NA
LUX	X	X		Z	NA
NL	X	X	X	Y,X	NA
UK	X	X	X	D - Y,X	NA
P	X	X	X	Y,X	NA *
SP	X	X	X	Y,X	Z

**Table 1: Multilateral conventions**

(1) European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities

(2) European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study.

(3) European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications.

(4) Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region.

(5) International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean.

X = in force

Y = ratified

Z = signed, but not ratified

NA = not applicable

\* = possibility of membership

D = withdrew UNESCO after ratification (YX).

State	1. University entrance qualification	2. Study periods up to first degree	3. First university degree	4. Second university degree
Portugal	A	E	5 yrs degree 6	
Spain	A	E	6	L
France	A	E	<i>Grandes Ecoles H/I</i>	
Italy	A	E	6	<i>Dottorato di ricerca:L</i>
Yugoslavia	A	E	H	
Albania	D	(1)	(1)	(1)
Greece	B	E	G	
Turkey	B	E	K	
Syria	D	F	K	I
Lebanon	C/D	F	K	I
Israel	A	E	K	I
Egypt	D	F	K	I

**Table 2a: Example - Possible academic recognition of university entrance qualifications and agricultural studies and degrees of countries bordering on the Mediterranean by German universities**

(For abbreviations, see overleaf)

State	1. University entrance qualification	2. Study periods up to first degree	3. First university degree	4. Second university degree
Libya	D	F	K	I
Tunisia	C	F	4 yr diploma: K	
Algeria	C	F	5 yr diploma: K/I	
Morocco	C	F	5 yr diploma: K/I	
Malta	A	E	K	
Cyprus	A/B			

**Table 2b : Example - Possible academic recognition of university entrance qualifications and agricultural studies and degrees of countries bordering on the Mediterranean by German universities**

**Index:**

A = generally full recognition

B = generally full recognition, if ...

C = No recognition: either one additional year of university studies in home country or additional (course and) examination in Germany requested

D = No recognition. Either additional two years of university studies in home country or additional (course and) examination in Germany requested

E = Recognition (if contents are acceptable)

F = Partial recognition (if level and contents are acceptable)

G = generally full recognition (equivalent to first German university degree)

H = generally full recognition (but not equivalent to first German university degree)

I = generally partial or conditional recognition (possible equivalence to first German university degree)

K = generally not recognized as equivalent to German university degree, but some of the studies will normally be recognized

L = generally recognized as comparable to German doctoral degree

(1) No experience.