

Prof. Lubor Fišera
Chairman
Accreditation Commission of the Slovak Republic (ACSR)

Vienna, 4 April 2013

Subject: ENQA decision on membership

Dear Professor Fišera,

Further to the meeting of the Board on 20 February 2013, where the ACSR's review report was carefully considered, I regret to inform you that the Board was not able to grant ACSR Full membership of ENQA.

In the review report, compliance has been assessed to be partial for the most important membership criteria (1 – Activities; 3 – Resources; 5 – Independence; 7 – Accountability procedures), as well as to criterion 8. Besides that, most of the areas for improvement are serious issues and concern the actual nature of the Agency. In the light of this, the Board shares the Panel's overall conclusion that, in the performance of its functions, ACSR is not yet sufficiently compliant to justify full membership of ENQA. The main areas for development are included in the Annex to this letter and will be considered by the panel in a next external review.

In addition, the Board took into consideration the difficulties encountered by the Panel due to a descriptive self-evaluation documentation and subsequent information worded to a very large extent in the same way as the document from the Czech Agency submitted several years beforehand.

I realise that you will be disappointed by this decision, but at the same time I would like to inform you that the Board of ENQA would welcome an application from ACSR for Affiliate status, which is not a membership category but represents a formal relationship with ENQA. For more information about this possibility, please visit the ENQA website at <http://www.enqa.eu/affil.lasso> and do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

If ACSR is dissatisfied with the decision of the Board not to grant it membership, it may file an appeal according to the procedures outlined in article 38 of the Statutes of ENQA.

The Board strongly advises your Agency, and believes it would be in its best interest, not to reapply for ENQA membership until there is a substantial material change to the procedures and operating structure of the Agency as mentioned above, or other significant developments occur, which cause you to believe that ACSR is able to meet the membership criteria fully.

Yours sincerely,



Achim Hopbach
President of ENQA

Annex: Areas for development

The Board suggests that, in addition to the other panel's recommendations, ACSR should pay particular attention to the following questions:

ENQA criterion 1, Activities – ESG 3.1, 3.3

- ACSR undertakes external QA activities on a regular basis both on the institutional and programme levels. As to processes, the review panel states in its summary statement: *"ACSR's processes and procedures are based on ENQA Criterion 1, but are not yet fully engaged with them in a number of critical areas."* (review report, p.26)
 - **Recommendations:** ACSR's processes should be more systematic. The recommendations of the panel address important issues.
ACSR should pay careful attention to the following areas : involvement of stakeholders in expert panels, systematic training of experts to assure consistency of judgments, quality enhancement issues in the evaluations, student representation in QA processes, activities in producing system-wide analyses. The panel considered ESG 2.3 to be fully compliant. However, the Board would like to stress that the decision-making processes of the agency's Working Groups and their procedures are also related to the training of experts that assures consistency of judgments.

ENQA Criterion 3 – Resources (ESG 3.4)

- The financial resources allocated to the ACSR are extremely limited and the current level of human resource is barely sufficient to meet the very high volume of activity.
 - **Recommendation:** financial and human resources should be reviewed and increased to respond future financial and staffing requirements.

ENQA Criterion 4 – Mission statement (ESG 3.5)

- Although the objectives of the agency are included in the legislation, the agency does not have an explicit mission statement addressing its goals, objectives and aspirations and relations with stakeholders.
 - **Recommendation:** while the panel judgement is substantial compliance, the Board would rather opt for partial compliance based on the panel's findings. ACSR should have a mission statement and strategic plan to align the quality assurance activities to the needs and requirements of stakeholders.

ENQA Criterion 5 – Independence (ESG 3.6)

- Formally, ACSR is an advisory body which is an integral part of the Ministry of Education (review report, p.33). The panel considers that the agency enjoys a high degree of operational independence in terms of selecting experts, among others. However, the panel observes that it has a limited autonomy in recruiting its own staff and defining its own evaluation procedures, as well as budgetary capacity. Concerning the independence of decision-making, the ACSR's final decisions take the form of recommendations to the

Minister. Moreover, the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and members of the ACSR are appointed by the Government on a recommendation from the Minister.

- **Recommendations:** independence from the Ministry should be more carefully tackled. The Agency should have increased autonomy in recruiting staff and defining evaluation procedures, as well as increased budgetary capacity. The agency should have sole responsibility for the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes.

ENQA Criterion 7 – Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

- The agency does not have in place a published policy for the quality assurance of ACSR's activity; formal feedback mechanisms from stakeholders on ACSR's activities; a basic conflict of interest declaration for external experts and a specific Code of Ethics for experts and staff.
 - **Recommendations:** the Board recommends ACSR to put in place and enforce a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts, to publish a policy for the QA of its activities, and to follow the panel's recommendations.

ENQA criterion 8i – Miscellaneous

- Through the report, the panel demonstrated a lack of consistency in the decision-making process.
 - **Recommendation:** consistency of decision making across the various Working Groups could be increased through a systematic training of experts.

ENQA Criterion 8ii: Miscellaneous

- The appeals model does not ensure sufficient independence at each stage of the process.
 - **Recommendation:** the appeals procedure should be independent of the first decision makers.

ENQA Criterion 8iii: Miscellaneous

- The agency's participation in the work of ENQA has been very limited in the last years.
 - **Recommendation:** increased financial and human resources would facilitate the involvement of ACSR in ENQA activities.