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EQAR Strategy 2018 - 2022

adopted by the 14th General Assembly, April 2018

1. EQAR – a pillar of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

Realising the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the common goal set by the 48 European governments who participate in the Bologna Process, supported by the European Union and the consultative members.

The EHEA aims to promote mobility of students and staff and to facilitate cooperation between countries and higher education institutions, e.g. through bilateral agreements, leagues, joint and double degrees. Mobility and cooperation will catalyse the functioning of a European labour market and further the internationalisation of teaching and learning.

While a broad range of policies have been agreed within the Bologna Process, three key commitments were identified as the main pillars of the EHEA[1]:

1. A harmonised educational landscape through the three-cycle structure based on a common qualifications framework (QF-EHEA)

2. Agreed principles for the recognition of qualifications as set out in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)

3. Robust internal and external quality assurance in line with agreed Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)

These instruments are underpinned by the EHEA's basic values of academic freedom and autonomous institutions.

One of the key commitments, quality assurance (QA) is essential for both quality enhancement and accountability, with a common framework for QA laid down in the ESG adopted by governments.

Higher educations institutions have the primary responsibility for quality and its assurance, while external QA, carried out by independent QA agencies, enables institutions to demonstrate accountability and helps institutions improve. Together, they ensure a learning environment in which the content of study programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

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[1] See
http://media.ehea.info/file/20180205-06-Sofia/71/7/BFUG_BG_SR_58_4c_AG3WG2Proposal_889717.pdf (*replace by reference to Paris Communiqué after adoption*)

EQAR was established by the Bologna Process as part of the EHEA's quality assurance infrastructure, to manage the EHEA's Register of agencies that are substantially compliant with ESG, serving as a tool for transparency and information. EQAR thus fulfils a public function and acts in the public interest. EQAR's broad membership of stakeholders and governments represents the public interest in the governance of the organisation.

Though modest and specific, EQAR's role is important as a basis for international trust in quality of European higher education, and thus for recognition and cooperation. Strengthening European cooperation is a shared aspiration of all parties involved in the Bologna Process, governments as well as stakeholder organisations.
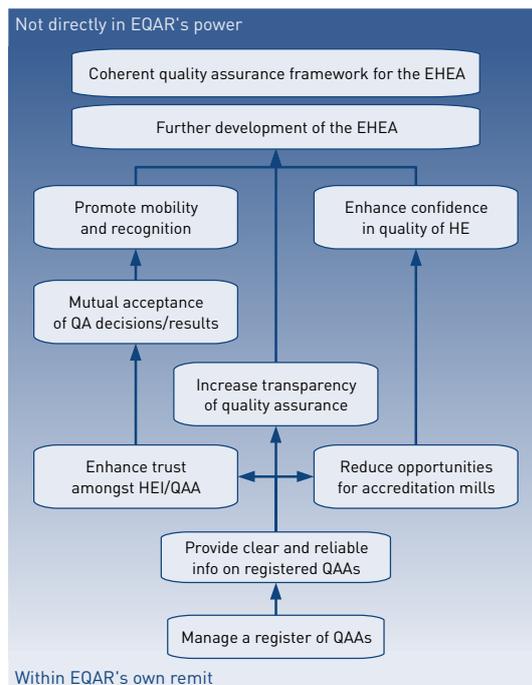
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(from Self-Evaluation Report)

2. Strategic goals

The two strategic goals identified in EQAR's first Strategic Plan 2013-2017 stemmed logically from its specific role and mission. Consistent with the Self-Evaluation Report 2016 and the resulting agreement not to change the mission, also the strategic goals remain valid.

While not changed in substance, their exact wording was changed to take account of the changed realities.

The first[2] strategic goal relates to what EQAR is doing and what lies in its own power, i.e. to enhance transparency and information.

The second strategic goal relates to the impact of EQAR. While EQAR can provide the foundation for trust and recognition, achievement of that goal does not lie in EQAR's power alone and depends on various other actors.

> **Vision**
>
> EQAR's vision is a coherent quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which higher education institutions have the freedom to turn to a suitable EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance reviews, and in which qualifications are thus universally recognised.

[2] Note: the order of the two strategic goals has been swapped so as to reflect a clear logic. – to be removed from final document

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Strategic Goal 1:   **Transparency and Information**

EQAR provides reliable and widely-used information on registered quality assurance agencies as well as on which higher education institutions or programmes have been subject to external quality assurance in line with the ESG.

Strategic Goal 2:   **International Trust and Recognition**

EQAR-registered agencies and their QA results are recognised across the EHEA. On that basis, qualifications that were subject to external quality assurance by registered agencies (whether at institutional or programme level) are recognised and, in line with national requirements, higher education institutions are allowed to work with a suitable registered agency to fulfil their formal external quality assurance obligations.

EQAR's activities are underpinned by the values formulated in its mission statement: independence; transparency; openness to diversity; proportionate, consistent and fair decision-making; and continuous improvement.

3. Activities earmarked for 2018 – 2022

EQAR's core activity is to manage the Register in a fair and consistent way, through its Register Committee. This includes the decision-making on inclusion and periodic renewal, as well as the monitoring and accountability measures in place between the periodic renewals: annual updates, reporting of substantive changes and third-party complaints.

All other activities are auxiliary to and build on this core activity, in order to promote the wider goals formulated in EQAR's mission.

Taking account of the recommendations in the Self-Evaluation Report, the following specific activities are earmarked under the two strategic goals.

The specific activities will be detailed and prioritised through EQAR's rolling Work Plans.

3.1 Transparency and information

- Maintain the register of quality assurance agencies and provide public information

- Establish a database of external quality assurance results and promote its use by different stakeholders

- Ensure that EQAR's instruments for monitoring agencies are seen as effective by agencies and policy makers

- Use analyses of the Register Committee's decisions as well as the information available on registered agencies and their activities to provide the sector with statistics and analyses

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- Maintain the active dialogue and communication with ENQA as the main review coordinator and representative body of agencies

3.2 Trust and recognition

- Maintain the public knowledge base on legal frameworks for external QA and cross-border recognition, including the use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

- Encourage EHEA governments to use EQAR registration as a basis to recognise external QA results and reduce duplication of efforts

- Maintain the information exchange with the ENIC-NARIC networks to promote the role of external QA and EQAR to support (automatic) recognition of qualifications

- Contribute to the EHEA working structure where relevant and appropriate in light of EQAR's specific role

- Reach out to the remaining EHEA countries to identify the reasons for not becoming governmental members and encourage them to join EQAR

4. Indicators to monitor progress

- Number of applicant QA agencies (compared with the total number of QA agencies operating in Europe)

- Number of and feedback from visitors to the EQAR website and the database of external quality assurance results (DEQAR)

- Number of countries using external quality assurance in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency, as a sufficient condition for recognition of qualifications

- Number of countries allowing higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR-registered QA agency to fulfil their external quality assurance obligations (legislation with reference to EQAR)

- Number of countries recognising decisions of all EQAR-registered QA agencies on joint programmes

- EQAR's governmental membership (goal: at least 90% of the EHEA countries by 2022)

5. Outlook

Based on the Strategy 2018 – 2022, EQAR will undertake its next self-evaluation, followed by a second external evaluation, in 2021/22.

Annex 1: Mission Statement

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Vision

EQAR's vision is a coherent quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which higher education institutions have the freedom to turn to any EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance reviews, and in which qualifications are thus universally recognised .

Mission

EQAR's mission is to further the development of the European Higher Education Area by increasing the transparency of quality assurance, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education.

EQAR seeks to provide clear and reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe, thus improving trust among agencies.

EQAR seeks to facilitate the mutual acceptance of quality assurance decisions and to improve trust among higher education institutions, thus promoting mobility and recognition.

EQAR seeks to reduce opportunities for "accreditation mills" to gain credibility in Europe, thus further enhancing the confidence of students, institutions, the labour market and society more generally in the quality of higher education provision in Europe.

To achieve its mission EQAR, through its independent Register Committee, manages a register of quality assurance agencies operating in Europe that substantially comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

Values

EQAR recognises the diversity of approaches to external quality assurance and is therefore open to all agencies, whether operating at programme or institutional level, and whether providing accreditation, evaluation or audit services.

EQAR is committed to the principles on which the ESG are based: external quality assurance should recognise the central responsibility of higher education institutions for quality development and should be carried out by independent quality assurance agencies in a transparent, objective and responsible manner, involving their stakeholders and leading to substantiated results based on well-defined procedures and criteria.

EQAR acts independently from other organisations and is committed to taking proportionate, consistent, fair and objective decisions.

EQAR makes transparent its mode of operation and its procedures while ensuring necessary confidentiality. EQAR is committed to continuously improving the quality of its work.

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Annex 2: Current situation and achievements

(for internal reference – not in published version)
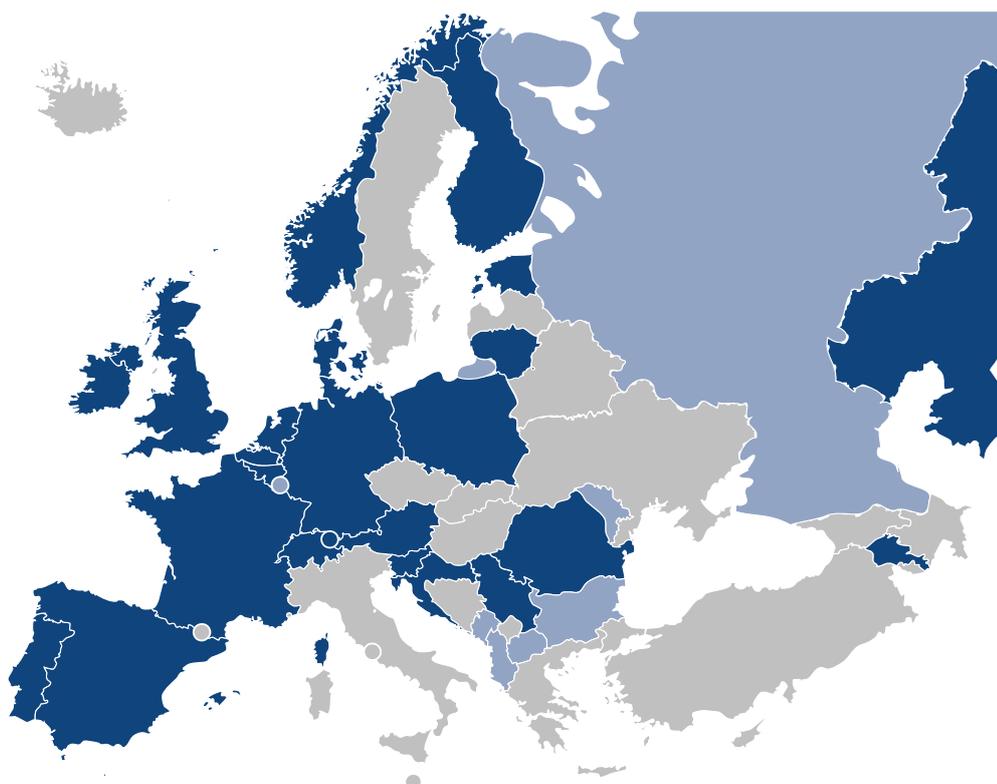
EHEA key commitment

23 EHEA countries fully implement the Bologna key commitment that external QA is performed by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG, preferably registered on EQAR. In 7 further countries, external QA is performed by ESG-compliant agencies for some, but not all higher education institutions[3].

External QA is performed by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG, preferably registered on EQAR
(AT, AM, BE-FL, BE-FR, CH, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, KZ, LI, LT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SI, UK)
External QA is performed by such agencies for some, but not all higher education institutions
(AL, BG, LU, MD, ME, MK, RU)

Map 1: External quality assurance performed by ESG-compliant agencies

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[3] 47 agencies (2013: 38) from 24 countries are registered on EQAR. Some additional countries do not have a national QA agency, but use EQAR-registered agencies based in other countries. In some countries, some but not all national QA agencies are registered.

Strategic Goal 1: International Trust and Recognition

- The ESG 2015 as well as the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes were adopted in 2015, with contributions of EQAR to both documents.

- 23 (2013: 9) countries allow their institutions to work with foreign, registered QA agencies for their regular external evaluation, audit or accreditation procedures. 13 use EQAR registration as eligibility requirement, 10 have their own, specific regulations for recognising foreign agencies.

- 16 countries with obligatory programme accreditation/evaluation allow the use of the European Approach for all or some institutions (2013: 11 recognised quality assurance decisions of all EQAR-registered agencies on joint programmes).

- 1 country automatically recognises foreign qualifications based on accreditation by an EQAR-registered agency.

- The EQAR Project Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity (RIQAA) has provided a good overview of legal provisions as well as challenges and opportunities of cross-border external QA. As a follow up, the E4 Group and EQAR have summarised "Key Considerations for Cross-Border QA".

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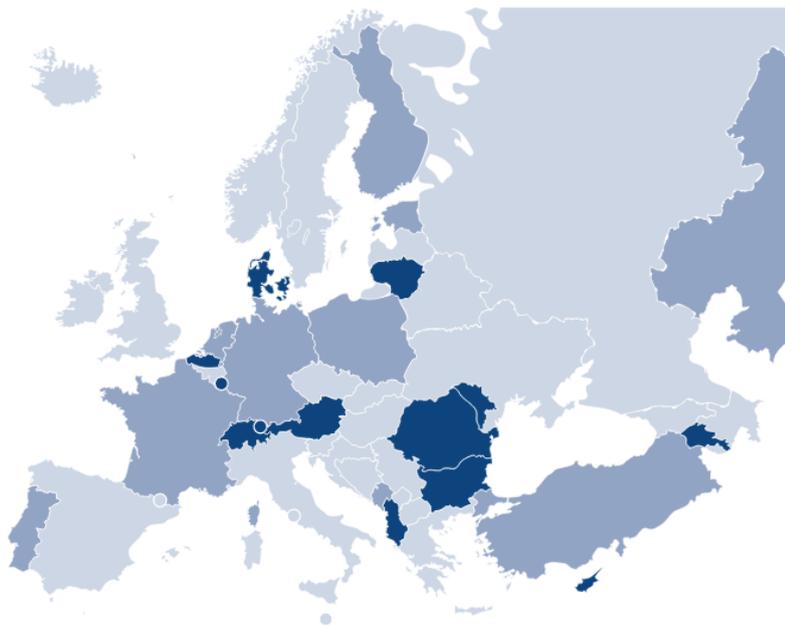**Date**   2018-04-23
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Countries recognising EQAR-registered QA agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA
(AL, AM, AT, BE-fl, BG, CH, CY, DK, LI, LT, LU, MD, RO
Countries recognising foreign agencies based on their own, specific framework or requirements
(DE, EE, FI, FR, KZ, ME, NL, PL, PT, TR)
Countries not open to external QA evaluation by a foreign QA agencies

Map 2: Recognition of EQAR-registered agencies and their results

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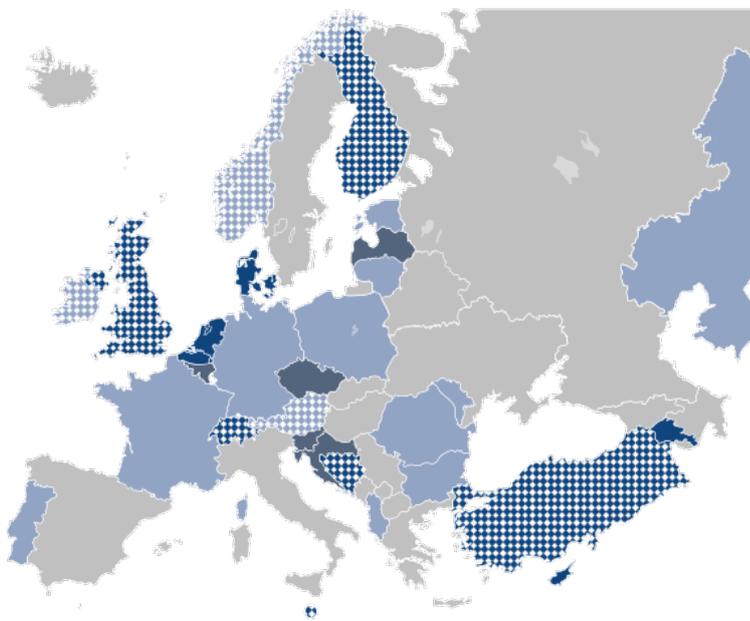
■ All higher education institutions are able to use the European Approach to satisfy national QA requirements

■ recognition of single external QA procedure for programmes: BE-fl, CY, DK, NL, AM, LI

▦ HEIs being self- accrediting: BA, CH, FI, MT, TR, UK

Some higher education institutions or only under specific conditions: AL, BG, DE, EE, FR, IE, KZ, LT, LU, PL, PT, MD, NO, RO,

■ Discussions ongoing: BE-fr, CZ, HR, LV, SI

■ Cannot be used to satisfy national QA requirements

Map 3: Availability of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Strategic Goal 2: Transparency and information

- EQAR makes public which QA agencies have demonstrated their compliance with the ESG and provides basic information on their activities.

- EQAR is about to set up a database of external quality assurance results, including information which higher education institutions or programmes have been externally quality-assured by registered agencies.

- EQAR is directly relevant primarily for governments and QA agencies, as well as for those higher education institutions that have an interest in external QA at the European level.

- The increased attention given to ESG Part 1 in the external reviews of registered agencies has connected EQAR registration, ESG compliance and impact on teaching and learning 'on the ground' in the work of the Register Committee.
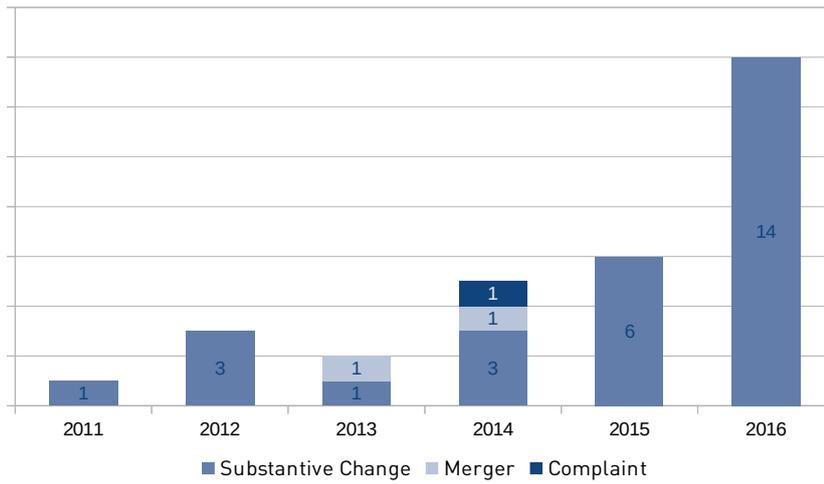
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Figure 1: Substantive Change Reports, Mergers, Complaints (2011 - 2016)
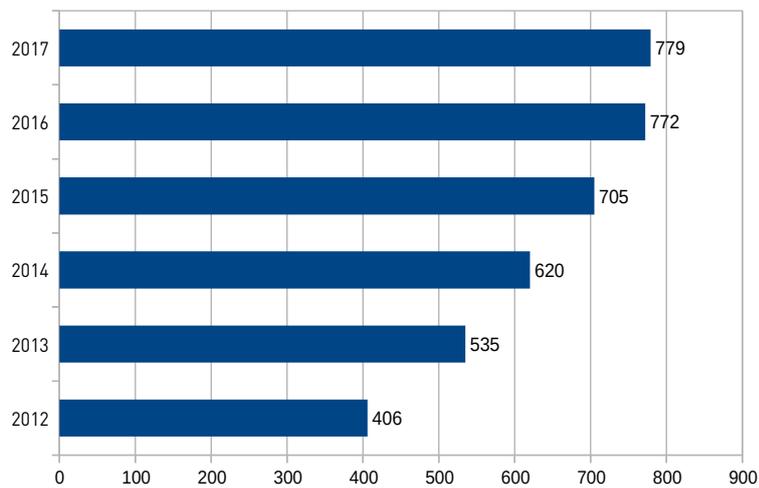
Figure 2: Subscribers to the EQAR newsletter (July 2017)

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Organisational development

79% of EHEA countries (38 out of 48, 2013: 65%) are governmental members of EQAR.
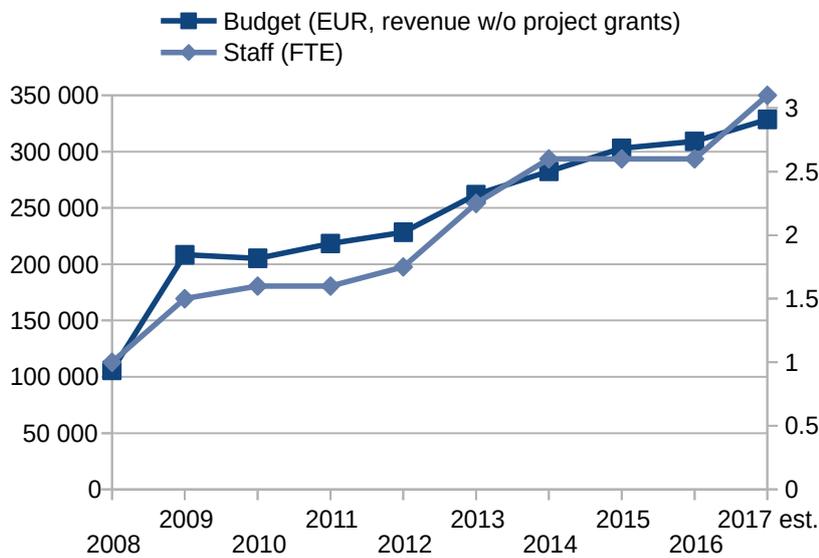
Figure 3: Budget and staff projection (2008 - 2017)

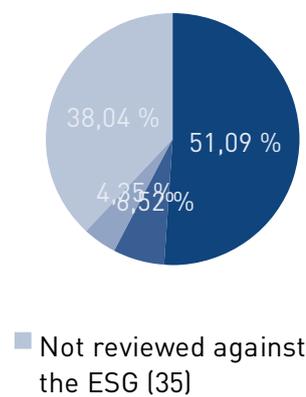| Registered QA Agencies	
20/06/2017	47 from 25 countries
31/12/2015	42 from 22 countries
31/12/2014	37 from 18 countries
General EQA	41
Specialised EQA (working in a few academic disciplines or professional fields)	6

38,04 %   51,09 %

4,35 %   8,52 %

■ Not reviewed against the ESG (35)

Figure 4: QA agencies in the EHEA (n=92, estimated)

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		2008-2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (July)	Total
A	Initial Applications	31	5	3	5	8	6	2	3	63
B	Approved	25	4	3	5	6	6	2	3	51
C	Withdrawn	3	1			1			0	5
D	Rejected	3				1			0	4
E	Renewal Applications		3	4	1	6	4	6	7	31
F	Approved		3	4	1	6	4	4	7	29
G	Withdrawn								0	0
H	Rejected								0	0
I	Appeals	1					1			2
J	Successful	1								1
K	Unsuccessful						1			1
L	Registration ended/expired		1	2	3	1				7
M	Registered [B - G - H - L]	25	28	29	31	37	42	44	47	47

Table 1: Applications for Inclusion/Renewal
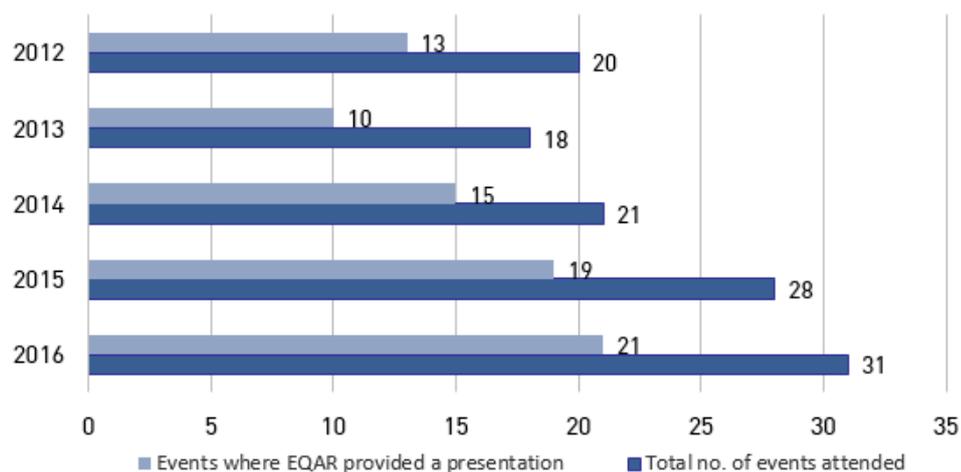
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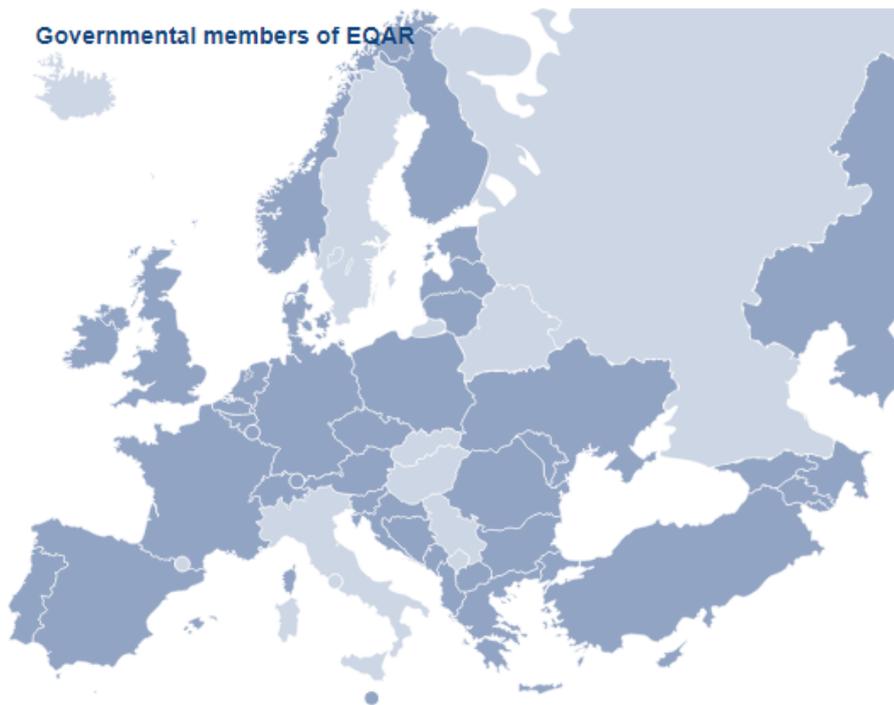**Ref.** GA14/04.1

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(2012 - 2016, excluding working groups/committees of which EQAR is a member)

Figure 5: EQAR's representation in external events

	Register Committee	Executive Board	Appeals Committee
Continuing since 2011	0	0	1
Newcomers	15	6	5
Ending mandates	14	6	4
Resignations	2	2	1

Table 2: Changes in the composition of EQAR's bodies (2011-2017)

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Governmental members of EQAR

Map 4: EQAR governmental member (July 2017)

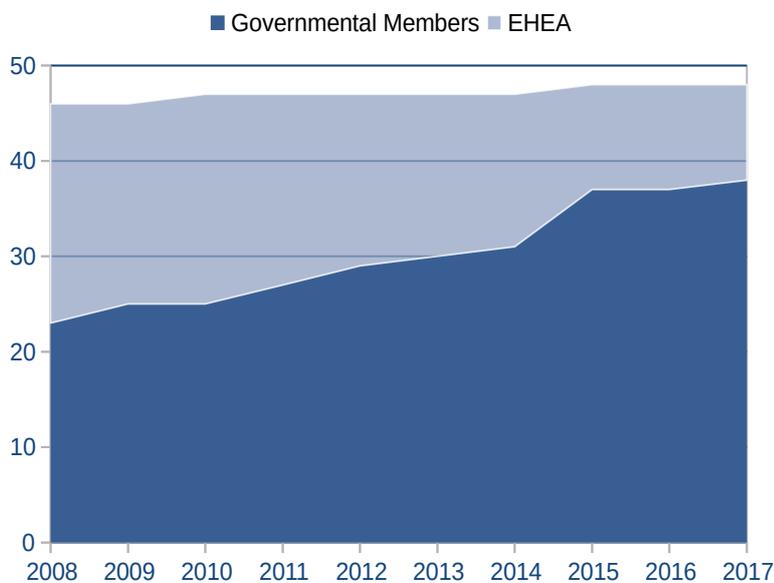*(AL, AM, AT, AZ, BA, BE, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GE, GR, HR, IE, KZ, LI, LT, LU, LV, MD, ME, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SI, TR, UA)*

Figure 6: Governmental Members (2008 - 2017)