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## **Article in L'Osservatore Romano by the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education (of Study Institutes), His Eminence Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi**

Agreement between the Holy See and the Italian Republic

on the recognition of qualifications in Higher Education

The agreement signed on 13 February 2019 between the Holy See, represented by me as Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education (of Study Institutes), and the Italian Republic, represented by the Minister for Education, Universities and Research, Professor Marco Bussetti, constitutes a significant advancement in relations between the Holy See and Italy in the field of higher education.

In the current text of the Concordat, signed on 11 February 1929 and revised through the agreement of 18 February 1984, which brings modifications to the Concordat, and the subsequent exchange of Notes on 25 January 1994, the qualifications of Theology and Sacred Scripture are determined as titles recognizable through a procedure currently carried out by the Dicasteries of the Holy See and by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research.

Given the lack of correspondence to the disciplines of Theology and Sacred Scripture in the Italian university system, in 1995 it was decided to proceed with an assessment of the equivalence of qualifications, recognized as Italian degrees and higher degrees, and therefore aimed only at the juridical effects of level. The recognition of all the other titles issued by the Institutions of Higher Education of the Holy See, based in Italy, did not find uniform recognition in Italy.

However, relations in the field of higher education between the Holy See and the Italian Republic are not attributable solely to the concordat material, but refer to the common belonging to the *Convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications in the European region* (Convention of Lisbon, 11 April 1997) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), to which the Holy See has been a member since 2003.

The same Lisbon Convention, ratified by both the Holy See and Italy, establishes the obligation of the contracting parties to recognize qualifications that give access to higher education in the other signatory States

[1] and provides for the creation of respective Information Centres related to the education system of each of the Contracting Parties, Centres which must collaborate in the ENIC-NARIC network under the aegis of UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In this context, the respective agencies for the evaluation of the quality of training systems have also been created, that is for the Holy See the AVEPRO agency, created with a chirograph by Pope Benedict XVI on 19 September 2007.

In particular, starting from 2014, during Italy's Presidency of the EU Council, Italy and the Holy See in co-chairmanship managed the Bologna Process and consequently also the EHEA. This cooperation has led to an ever closer collaboration between the competent bodies of the Holy See and Italy in the educational field.

These are the motivations for starting, with a technical collaboration agreement, the implementation of the Lisbon Convention, now in force for more than 20 years.

The agreement provides for the full recognition by Italy of all the titles issued by the Institutions of Higher Education erected or approved by the Holy See and those legally recognized by Italy, according to the principles of the Lisbon Convention, in order to facilitate academic collaboration and the mobility of students and researchers.

The procedure that must be carried out through the institutions of Higher Education of Italy and the Holy See, respecting their institutional autonomy, will need to provide for the individual evaluation of the study periods and the related final titles. The institutions will provide for the recognition and / or granting of the continuation of studies in the Italian or Holy See system. The agreement also clarifies that the titles envisaged by the Concordat (Theology and Sacred Scripture at the time) will continue to be recognized by decree of the Minister for Education, Universities and Research in accordance with the procedure in force since 1995.

The agreement will strengthen and enhance in particular the collaboration between the Universities, Faculties and other Roman Pontifical Institutions with their Italian sisters in the eternal city, thus creating in Rome a university centre unique in the world, in which in addition to the various disciplines of the comprehensive and specialized universities in Italy it is possible to study in 62 faculties or specialized institutes under the authority of the Holy See:

In addition to the sacred sciences and those connected with them, a wide range of other ecclesiastical studies is offered, from Christian archaeology to the interdisciplinary licentiate on the protection of minors, from sacred music to Arabic and Islamic studies, from psychology to social communication, or from classical and Christian languages to studies on the Family and Church management.

**Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi**

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[1] Section IV – Recognition of qualifications providing access to higher education, Article IV.1 *“Each Party shall recognize the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for access to higher education in those Parties for the purpose of access to programmes belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought”*.

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