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ISSUES FOR THE BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ

Document for discussion by the BFUG meeting on 12-13 October 2004

1. BACKGROUND

At its meeting on 13 September, the BFUG Board had a first discussion on issues for the Bergen Communiqué. This discussion paper, based on the deliberations by the Board, is meant as a platform for a first discussion in the BFUG.

2. PREVIOUS COMMUNIQUÉS

The communiqués from Prague and Berlin have two main dimensions: An evaluation of the progress since the previous conference and signals regarding the follow-up after the conference. The communiqués have to a large extent been built up around the action lines of the Bologna Process. For each action line, developments are reported and corrective measures indicated when relevant. Recommendations from the Bologna follow-up seminars have been central elements in this process. New action lines have been introduced, including the "transversal action line" represented by the social dimension of the Bologna Process. Criteria for membership have been set and the follow-up structures have been developed through the successive communiqués.

3. PROGRESS SINCE BERLIN

The recommendations of the Berlin Communiqué were directed at national authorities, institutions and organisations. This active participation of all partners is the key to the long-term success of the Bologna Process. A number of such activities are included in the BFUG Work Programme 2003-2005 and should be reported to the Ministers in a concise way. This will be done through the General Report 2003-2005 to be drafted by the Secretariat.

The BFUG Work Programme includes a series of seminars. Outcomes from these seminars will contribute not only to the General Report, but may be used as input to other BFUG activities. When relevant for the main themes of the Bergen Communiqué, a limited number of recommendations from seminars may be included in the draft communiqué.

It is clear from the Berlin Communiqué that the Ministers envisaged that the BFUG should take responsibility for co-ordination of actions in the following areas:

- the stocktaking exercise;
- developing an overarching framework of qualifications;
- monitoring the ENQA project on quality assurance.

The outcomes of these actions will form important elements in relation to the Ministers' deliberations in Bergen and the Communiqué.

3.1. Stocktaking

The stocktaking exercise will provide information on how the process is actually advancing in the member countries in the three intermediate priority areas: the degree system, quality assurance and recognition. National reports will supplement the stocktaking and in addition to this, EURYDICE will produce a 2005 update of the report *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe*, which also forms part of the data material for the stocktaking.

This will offer the possibility for Ministers to take corrective measures, if appropriate. The outcomes of the stocktaking should be reflected in the Bergen Communiqué in such a way that its function as a basis for resulting actions, decisions and priorities is made clear. For instance, Ministers may take note of results in a particular area and proceed to make recommendations or decisions.

3.2. An overarching framework of qualifications

A first projection of the outcome of this project may be seen in the status report to be presented to the BFUG on 12-13 October 2004. The need for this overarching frame is clearly felt in the large number of Bologna countries now developing national frameworks. A dynamic interaction between the development of an overarching framework for higher education and the parallel development of a qualifications framework for vocational education and training is essential if the goals of the Bologna Process are to be achieved, not least in a lifelong learning context. The draft communiqué must present Ministers with a solid platform for deciding on guidelines for further development in this important field.

3.3. The ENQA project on quality assurance

Preliminary drafts of the ENQA report were presented to the Board on 13 September. A new version will be presented to the BFUG on 12-13 October. Ministers asked that this project should be carried out through the member organisations (the national QA agencies) and in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB. Full co-ordination with all the parties concerned will be no easy task. However, the Board noted in its meeting on 13 September that a broad consensus had already been established concerning major principles. Laying the foundation for the BFUG to advise Ministers on such principles and draft the Communiqué accordingly, the final report should bring this important work a long way forward.

4. THE BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ LOOKING FORWARD

To set the course for the final leg of the Bologna Process, it will be necessary to define the goals for 2010 in a more precise way. It may be too early to define the 2010 goals in Bergen, but Ministers may have a preliminary discussion and ask for such goals to be proposed for the next Ministerial Conference in 2007.

As an intermediate step, a limited number of areas could be given priority for the period 2005-2007. Setting concrete goals for 2007 in these areas would supplement the 2005 goals and establish a platform for defining the goals for 2010.

4.1. Intermediate goals for 2007

Intermediate priorities for 2007 should focus on the existing action lines, including the social dimension. No further action lines should be introduced. New themes may come up in connection with the setting of goals for 2010 and must then be studied and discussed for the benefit of the process.

In the Board meeting on 13 September it was pointed out that the success of the Berlin Communiqué stemmed from the fact that it set concrete targets. Clear goals should therefore also be set in the areas defined as priority areas in the period leading up to 2007. This may be easier for some action lines than others. The Board asked that the next version of the document prepared by the Secretariat should contain a “shopping list” of possible priority areas and targets.

Going through the ten action lines, the following possibilities may be considered (excluding the action lines given priority for the 2003-2005 period):

- Promotion of mobility;
- Promotion of the European dimension in higher education;
- Lifelong learning;
- Higher education institutions and students;
- Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA;
- Doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and the ERA.

Also, the social dimension should be considered as a possible priority area.

Promotion of mobility is central to the process. At present, detailed relevant statistics are not available from most countries. If such statistics could be developed, it would be of great interest to the Bologna Process. As economic and social factors vary greatly between member countries, setting common quantitative goals may not be fair. Also, visa conditions vary greatly between different groups of countries, depending on political factors outside the mandate of Ministers of Education. For staff mobility, factors like social security and pensions will be central. Giving priority to concrete actions in the field of mobility will require considerable resources if significant results are to be obtained in two years' time. One possibility within the Bologna framework might be for each country to set its own targets.

Promotion of the European dimension may be a possible priority. However, the first thing that may be required is confirmation by the BFUG, and possibly also by the Ministers, relating to the use of the concept *promotion* in this context: It is a common understanding that it involves the *development* of the European dimension by institutions and member countries and internal promotion within the Bologna process. External promotion falls under the action line *Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA*, commented on below. It could be a priority to flesh out the concept of the European dimension with concrete elements by agreeing on a limited number of factors to focus on (joint degrees, European curriculum, mastering of foreign languages, ...), describing concrete actions for each and possibly also carry out a stocktaking.

Lifelong learning has not been prominent in the follow-up activities since Berlin. The Bologna Process may more actively seek to meet the challenges from the Copenhagen Process and contribute actively to the development of bridges between the different levels of the education system. It may also focus on policies and actions to strengthen the contribution from higher education institutions to the needs of working life regarding lifelong learning,

including the recognition of prior learning. Giving priority to *the relations between higher education and vocational education* may be considered. This would be a transversal effort, as it might include a number of elements such as QA, frameworks (National frameworks, the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area, the developing framework in the vocational sector (ECTS/ECVET) and Europass.

The action line *Higher education institutions and students* covers a variety of themes. Regarding institutions, one may consider the introduction of more precise concepts, as the indiscriminate use of *university* and *higher education institution* is often confusing. Linked to this is the concept of *autonomy* which may or may not be relevant for all higher education institutions, with varying content in different countries.

Linked to the *student* element in this action line, there is the “transversal” action line of *the social dimension*. In Berlin, Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process and pointed out that the need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the EHEA, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and European level. Not much follow-up on this point can be reported to Ministers in Bergen. Priority might be given to this theme for the period up to 2007.

Though the BFUG might not get any input relating to the third cycle until the after the seminar “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society” in February 2005, it seems reasonable to prepare for an intensive follow-up of the action line on *doctoral studies and the synergy between HE and research* after Bergen. Focus could be on the structure of doctoral programmes and on the removal of differences which stand in the way of co-operation, student mobility and the development of joint programmes and degrees. Also, the relation between universities and separate (groups of) research institutions might be looked into.

Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA may perhaps best be given priority as 2010 draws nearer, as it may be wise to have a more precise description of the EHEA before establishing defined goals for the promotion. In the meantime (up to 2007) it may be wise to give some priority to the links between Europe and the wider world, in particular when it comes to QA and recognition and where the UNESCO/OECD project builds on the same central principles as the Bologna Process.

For the priority themes selected, the BFUG should propose well-defined intermediate goals for 2007 (as was done for three themes for the Berlin-Bergen period.)

4.2. Goals for 2010

As 2010 draws nearer it will be necessary to supplement the vision of the EHEA with a concrete description of what it should be.

An overarching qualifications framework may form an important element in the systemic part of this description.

Another element in the description of the EHEA could be the Lisbon Recognition Convention, as all member countries have been asked to ratify this convention. Subsidiary texts to the convention deal with transnational education and joint degrees respectively.

Next, based on the ongoing work on QA, member countries may agree on common principles and standards in quality assurance. They may consider working towards a more binding agreement by developing a convention along similar lines as the Lisbon Convention.

As became apparent in the BFUG's formulation of requirements for joining the Bologna Process, *a number of principles* are implicitly part of the platform for the Process.

First of all, the Bologna Process (like the Lisbon Recognition Convention) is a co-operative venture between nation states, in which each has the right to decide on its education policy, including higher education. There is no central decision-making power.

Furthermore, there has been a common understanding, expressed in the Bologna Declaration itself or in the Communiqués from the ministerial meetings, that the following principles are inherent in the Bologna Process:

- Mobility of students and staff;
- Autonomous universities /higher education institutions;
- Student participation in the governance of higher education;
- Public responsibility for higher education;
- The importance of the social dimension.

Applicant states are requested to confirm their respect for these principles in their applications. By 2010, member states may be asked to do the same.

For the EHEA to become a reality, some sort of formal commitment from the participating countries may be necessary in 2010. The Bergen Communiqué may ask the BFUG to come up with options for Ministers to discuss at the next Ministerial Conference.

5. AN OPEN DISCUSSION BY MINISTERS IN BERGEN

The Bergen Communiqué will be carefully drafted under the responsibility of the BFUG. Ministers may influence the preparation through their national representatives in the BFUG. BFUG members are asked to be in touch with their ministers during the preparatory phase. However, if consensus is to be achieved, the possibilities and opportunities for major changes in the final phase will be limited.

This does not give Ministers the possibility to influence the process to the extent that they may want. To remedy this, the BFUG Board proposed in its meeting on 13 September that the BFUG should present the Ministerial Conference with a discussion document, bringing to the Ministers' attention a few important topics relating to the status of the EHEA from 2010 onwards. Should the EHEA be formalised in a suitable way? Should the agreed framework be binding for member countries? How can that be achieved? How to secure dynamism in the system also after 2010?

The outcome of this discussion may be set down in minutes and referred to in the Communiqué as guidance for the Follow-up Group in its work after Bergen.