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APPLICATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

1. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION

The criteria for admission of new participating countries (members) to the Bologna Process at the Ministerial Conference in Bergen was set by the Berlin Communiqué:

Countries party to the European Cultural Convention shall be eligible for membership of the European Higher Education Area provided that they at the same time declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education. Their applications should contain information on how they will implement the principles and objectives of the declaration.

As applicant countries sought guidance on the procedures and requirements for membership of the Bologna Process, a document explaining the requirements and procedures was developed by the BFUG Secretariat and decided by the BFUG Board in June 2004. The document was made available to interested parties at the Bologna-Bergen web site.

The purpose of this document was to meet the objective in a fair and transparent manner. It also consolidated both principles and action lines of the Bologna Process into a single document. The document made it clear that although the ten action lines are the main focus of Member States, it is equally important to note the underlying principles of the Bologna Process. The realisation of the European Higher Education Area can only be achieved by incorporating these principles within the higher education system of each country:

- International mobility of students and staff;
- Autonomous universities;
- Student participation in the governance of higher education;
- Public responsibility for higher education;
- Higher Education having a social dimension.

Applicant States were requested to confirm their respect for these principles in their applications. Regarding the ten action lines, interested parties were referred to the BFUG Work Programme 2003-2005. The deadline for applications was set to 31 December 2004.

As members of the Bologna Process were asked to produce a national report before the Bergen Ministerial Conference, potential members were asked to produce a report in a similar format, with a special focus on the three intermediate priorities (objects of the stocktaking). A template identifying the key questions of the report was made available at the web site.

Regarding procedures for application, it was made known that the decision to accept new members to the Bologna Process would be taken by the next Ministerial Conference. The role

of the BFUG would be to make a recommendation, having satisfied itself of the credentials and commitment of the applicants.

Potential members were asked to send an application for membership to the Minister responsible for Higher Education in the Host Country for the next Ministerial Conference, with a copy to the BFUG Chair. The application, which should be signed by the (national) Minister responsible for higher education, should declare their commitment to pursue and implement the principles and objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education.

2. APPLICATIONS

By the deadline 31 December 2004, the following states had applied for participation (membership) in the Bologna Process: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Ukraine. All applications are in accordance with the prescribed procedure. After the deadline, also Kosovo has applied for membership. All letters of application and corresponding reports have been sent out for this meeting, they are also available at the Bologna web site “behind the curtain”.

2.1. Applicants party to the European Cultural Convention

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are all party to the European Cultural Convention. All five countries have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Ukraine started its preparation for joining the Bologna Process before Berlin. Considerable changes have since then been made in legislation to adapt to the Bologna Process and a number of seminars relating to the Bologna Process have been organised in cooperation with international partners, notably the Council of Europe, UNESCO-CEPES and the EUA. An international seminar in May 2004 gave a strong support to the Ukrainean efforts.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia made their intentions known to join the Bologna Process at Council of Europe Ministerial Conference for South Caucasus in May 2004. Since then they have been working actively to adjust their legislation to the Bologna Process and further seminars have been/ will be organised in each country in cooperation with Council of Europe.

Moldova announced its intention to join the Bologna Process in June 2004 and have since then worked actively to prepare for participation, adjusting legislation in active dialogue with the National Rectors’ Conference, organising seminars in cooperation with Council of Europe.

For all five countries, Bologna has been a model for much-needed reforms in their higher education systems. For all countries, the Bologna Process also means a bridge to Europe. All countries have sent reports giving the information asked for in a satisfactory manner. The necessary national framework for Bologna participation is in place.

There are weak points in all applicant countries, notably old-fashioned teaching methods and possibly uneven standards due to weak national economies. Weak economies also have implications for the social dimension. Quality and quality assurance must be further

developed. However, this does not differ from the situation before Berlin, where countries facing similar challenges were welcomed to the Bologna Process.

2.2. Applicants not party to the European Cultural Convention

Kazakhstan is not within the group of states that have ratified the European Cultural Convention. According to the criteria set down in the Berlin Communiqué, Kazakhstan is therefore not eligible for membership in the EHEA. However, as Kazakhstan is reforming its higher education system along the general lines of the Bologna Process, its interest in the Process is understandable. Inviting representatives from Kazakhstan authorities and institutions to Bologna Seminars should not constitute any problem. It may simply be left to the organisers. Inviting Kazakhstan to participate as observer to the Bergen Ministerial Conference is being considered by the host country.

The BFUG Board has asked the Secretariat to consider how states outside Europe could form links with the Bologna Process. In the discussion document BFUG4 11 and in the Draft Bergen Communiqué (item 13 on the agenda) it is indicated that the Bologna Process may want to establish partnerships with higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions, and sharing experiences with reform processes in neighbouring regions. Central Asia may be such region.

International negotiations on the future status of *Kosovo* may start in 2005. Hopefully an agreement will be reached, but is not for the BFUG to stipulate what may be the outcome. In the present situation, Kosovo is not eligible for direct membership in the Bologna Process as it is not a state that has ratified the European Cultural Convention. With assistance from the Council of Europe, the EUA and other organisations, the higher education system in Kosovo has been reformed along the lines of the Bologna Process. For higher education in Kosovo, cooperation with European partners is very much needed for further development. However, the University of Mitrovica has for the time being no licence from the relevant authority (UNMIK), this leaves the University of Pristina as the only potential partner for institutional cooperation and for participation in Bologna seminars (even though there are presently problems concerning the election of a new Rector of this institution). Representatives for Kosovo participated in the Berlin Ministerial Conference. Inviting Kosovo as observer to the Bergen Ministerial Conference is being considered by the host country.

3. CONCLUSION

In its meeting on 25 January 2005, the BFUG Board considered the applications and reports received and decided to propose that the BFUG advise Ministers in Bergen to welcome Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as participating countries (members) in the Bologna Process.