**EURASHE input for the Structural Reforms working group of the BFUG**

1. **The main challenges the EHEA is facing taking into account the major political, economic, social and technological developments;**

The ‘Bologna process’ has contributed to formulating answers to international challenges. Yet, they have been implemented mostly in diverse national structures, instead of really reshaping structures and processes in the wide range of higher-education institutions. The EHEA, structurally, is becoming a multi-stranded international entity; but as yet, it is not felt to be at the heart of higher education.

Worryingly, the current economic crisis induces particular governments to cut the budget of (higher) education and research, which, undoubtedly, has consequences for programmes and curricula in disciplines that are not activated by, or respond to immediate market demands, but are vitally necessary for a progressive and sustainable European society. We believe that robust and systemic investment in (higher) education and learning is a key response not only to the current crisis, but to long-term challenges which our societies face.

We can say that legislation has been put in place, without always having in mind its effectiveness on the level of actual implementation in the institutions. What is needed is a regulatory framework that fully supports the institutional level, which still shows a lack of implementation of the main tools of the Bologna process, such as internal QA processes, ECTS and the D.S.

On the national or governmental level more could be done for the dissemination of information to the institutions and there may be insufficient stress on the mandatory character of the implementation of the Bologna priorities, which in institutions is seen to conflict with their institutional autonomy.

1. **The extent to which the  EHEA Structural Reforms are suitable to address those challenges and the way those reforms can be reinforced as well as;**
2. **The main political goals of the Bologna Process of tomorrow.**

**A National Qualifications Frameworks and Student Centred Learning**

National Qualifications Frameworks lie at the heart of efforts to transform higher education in Europe, increasing the opportunities for access, transfer and progress within and between different European educational jurisdictions, while promoting employability and lifelong learning by offering multiple entry and access points.

Within National Qualifications Frameworks, focusing on learning outcomes at institutional level ensures appropriate attention to design, delivery and assessment of learning and encourages a student-centred learning mind-set and culture across higher-education institutions.

Governments should promote wider general understanding and awareness of the European Qualifications Framework, National Qualifications Frameworks and learning outcomes for access, transfer and progression in higher education on national and EU level and for employability and lifelong learning.

Also professional higher-education qualifications have to be granted full recognition in all EHEA countries and in all higher-education institutions, in accordance with the QF-EHEA and the commitments under the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Innovative labour-market oriented short-cycle higher-education programmes should be incorporated into National Qualifications Frameworks and the qualifications profile and distinctive pedagogic approaches of professional higher education highlighted as features in the global attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

It is important to provide and support personal development of higher-education institution management and staff, exchange of good practice and collaboration related to learning outcomes and the on-going reflective process of a student-centred learning approach.

**B Employability and Lifelong Learning**

A sustainable and long-term future for the citizens of Europe is one in which the focus is on employability, rather than immediate employment, and that it is inextricably linked to the constant pursuit of self-development and professional fulfilment through lifelong learning.

Therefore, in the 2012-2015 phase of Implementation of the EHEA, the national structures should promote flexible and interconnected systems of higher education, embedded within lifelong learning, with flexible entry and exit points, with effective and flexible routes that allow learners to progress seamlessly through all levels of national frameworks and thus ensure that higher education is accessible to non-traditional learners. The culture of lifelong learning as a response to societal, labour market and technological challenges and as a way of promoting personal developments of individuals should be raised and promoted.

It is essential to gather and provide access to data on employability of higher-education graduates, and the make visible labour market prospects in order to empower the understanding and qualified decisions of both higher-education institutions and individuals. Individuals’ study paths through higher education should be made more effective and efficient by acknowledging the role of recognition of prior learning, while setting conditions for its transparency and in correspondence with an overall quality culture.

**C Quality Assurance and Transparency Tools**

There is a high need for identifying and developing qualitative and quantitative descriptors and indicators that will ensure the practical usefulness of the multidimensional instruments to the prospective learner. It is a government responsibility to create clarity and transparency to stakeholders and society about the external quality assurance, ranking and classification systems used in higher education.

Quality assurance models must be in line with the principles and priorities of the Bologna Process, of which they are supportive instruments rather than objectives in themselves. The institutions’ ownership of quality assurance should be affirmed as a key instrument of their quality enhancement, a basis of their accountability, and a reflection of their necessary autonomy.

There must be more support for the involvement of all stakeholders in quality assurance because of their indisputable role in contributing to a fair and full qualitative picture *of* the link between quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and learning outcomes on a national level.

Ministers have entrusted the ‘E4’ group with presenting a proposal for the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in close cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Concurrently with this, there must be a wider understanding in institutions regarding the linkage of external and internal quality assurance to stakeholders and also to the different international higher-education systems.

**D Mobility and International Openness**

The ultimate aim of creating the European Higher Education Area was to create more ‘transparency’ in European higher education, which would facilitate recognition, the accepted and established cornerstone of academic mobility (of students, graduates and teachers).

In order to achieve these policy intentions the mobility of students must be expanded in all EHEA countries, in all three cycles and in its various forms. We need to promote the equal participation of diverse student groups in mobility, ensure the high quality of mobility for learners and promote the mobility of teachers, early-stage researchers and other staff in higher education.

We therefore need to gather and keep records of all forms and types of mobility, including short-term mobility, and also the ones that are presently excluded from financing through the EU programmes. All forms of mobility should be actively supported and co-financed, which is in line with the diversified profiles and missions of higher-education programmes and institutions, also in the context of lifelong learning.

Enough attention should be given to intensifying the work on recognition and transparency tools, including inter-sectorial mobility as well as on enabling better access for mobility for all groups of potential learners.

**E Research, Development and Innovation**

There is still a perception that the Bologna regulations are something different from the daily business of an institution, as reflected in its threefold mission of teaching, research and service to the community. ‘Bologna’ has contributed to the dichotomy between the research mission of a HEI and its role as a teaching and learning environment. Research should be seen as something fully embedded in the curriculum, and integrated in the societal role of an institution.

A successful strategy for the implementation of an Innovation Union policy, as promoted by the European Commission, has to strive for economic prosperity while securing societal welfare. This requires a sustainable innovation basis, which invests in building strategic alliances to foster innovation creativity and dissemination.

The available European funds should be more effectively used to act as a leverage for better collaboration between member states and there is a need for complementary sources of public and private funding, with a specific focus on impact driven innovation and research projects.

A framework that makes use of new research performance indicators, with an expected output in 4 domains: science, education, society and the professions should be developed and the whole innovation cycle should be involved by stimulating the building of stronger knowledge alliances between SMEs, public organisations, regions, regional training centres and higher education institutions, including Universities of Applied Sciences.

Governments willing to incorporate all stakeholders into this process, should also involve those enterprises and organisations (like SMEs) who experience the need to innovate, but do not have an extensive R&D infrastructure in place. The Education, Structural and Framework Funds should be aligned in a ‘smart combination’, which will contribute to a fast response to the innovation and research needs of the world of work. Efforts should be made to invest in professional and industrial PhDs in order to deliver a new generation of impact driven researchers for the EHEA.