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***COVER NOTE***

**REVISED DRAFT OF THE YEREVAN COMMUNIQUÉ**

The BFUG meeting in Rīga on January 25 – 26 had a first discussion of the draft Yerevan Communiqué. A revised draft on the basis of the discussions in Rīga was circulated to all delegations for comments. 24 delegations submitted comments.

Delegations were invited to submit clearly identifiable suggestions for concrete rewording and/or delegations, preferably as track changes to the draft sent for consultations. Most delegations broadly followed these guidelines but in the case of two submissions, it was impossible for the drafting group to identify concrete suggestions, either because these were not indicated or because the suggestions were very general comments rather than proposals for amendments. Overall, we received substantially more comments and proposed amendments to the introduction than to other parts of the draft.

On the basis of these comments, the drafting group now submits a revised draft for the Board’s consideration (Appendix 1).

In developing the revised draft, the drafting group reviewed all comments and even if a good number of choices inevitably had to be made, the drafting group sought to take account of as many suggestions as possible. This, however, resulted in a draft of more than 4 pages.

Therefore, the drafting group reviewed the draft once again and cut it down to slightly more than 3 pages. This is probably still longer than what the BFUG would wish in principle but it is considerably shorter than what the BFUG would wish based on the comments submitted. The revised draft as submitted now is therefore more than a simple review of comments received; in some cases, the drafting group has had to develop new wording.

The drafting group takes the view that the communiqué should focus on decisions by Ministers. These do not necessarily need to be explained or justified in detail as it was suggested in several cases. When the drafting group attempted to accommodate those suggestions in the draft, both the size of the communique grew substantially and also the communique became more technical than political; in part it read like technical instructions to carry out certain tasks. Drafting group has therefore, in general, not taken up suggestions intended to provide an explanatory narrative for specific measures. It has also sought to avoid repetition.

The Board is invited to review the draft and to prepare the discussion of the revised communiqué in BFUG on March 24 – 25. In so doing, it may in particular wish to consider the following issues:

* Most delegations are broadly happy with the revised structure and most comments are comments of detail. However, the EUA (Appendix 2) and the European Commission (Appendix 3) propose major rewrites. These proposals, which diverge considerably not only from the draft sent for consultation but also from each other, are too extensive to incorporate with simple amendments to the existing text and based on the comments by the remaining 22 delegations, the drafting group did not have the mandate to base the new revised draft on either of these proposals but the Board should consider whether and how these proposals should be used in the further work on the communiqué. The Board therefore needs to decide: (a) whether to undertake a substantial rewrite the draft, and (b) if so, which of the alternative versions to use as the basis.
* The revised draft builds on what the drafting group read as the BFUG’s position in January that the draft should emphasize future challenges over past achievements, be more political, and also provide a link between higher education and broader societal and political challenges. We have therefore not taken on board a number of comments saying the communiqué should begin with a more upbeat overview of main achievements. The board should consider whether it agrees with this position.
* Denmark, Finland, Poland, and Sweden all raise objections to part of the proposals by the Mobility and Internationalization WG, as these are reflected in the appendix to the draft communiqué. However, these objections were not raised at the January BFUG, when the report was adopted. Does the Board take the view that these issues were decided through the adoption of the report in January or does it recommend that the discussion of the report be reopened in March?
* While most delegations are happy for Ministers to “endorse” the reports by the working groups etc., some prefer terms such as “take note of” or “acknowledge”. These terms are, in the view of the drafting group, too weak.