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**YEREVAN COMMUNIQUÉ REVISED DRAFT FOLLOWING COMMENTS BY DELEGATIONS FEBRUARY 4 – 9, 2015**

**A new vision for the European Higher Education Area**

**A new reality**

Midway through the second decade of the European Higher Education Area, we, the Ministers, meeting in Yerevan on 14 - 15 May 2015 underscore that the continued development of European societies depends on the strong contribution of higher education.

In many of our countries, we face a particular challenge in ensuring the place of minorities as integrated members of society with equal opportunities to access and successfully complete higher education. To develop the potential of those of our young people who have lost hope, we need the knowledge, understanding and will to foster opportunities, create jobs and develop meaningful participation in society. To prevent and resolve conflicts among members of the EHEA and with its neighbours, we need the knowledge, understanding and will to conduct dialogue. To integrate those whose beliefs and convictions differ from those of the majority, we need the knowledge, understanding and will to develop mutual respect. To avoid creating stereotypes that stigmatize whole groups, we need the knowledge, understanding and will to develop democratic culture.

We reaffirm the key role of higher education in preparing graduates for employment as well as for life as active citizens in democratic society, furthering personal development and developing a broad, advanced knowledge base. We remain committed to an area of higher education in which students, graduates and staff can move freely with full and fair recognition of their qualifications, based on public responsibility for higher education, including public funding of it, academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

We are proud of our joint achievements over the past 16 years. The EHEA is being built through open dialogue and cooperation between the 47 member states, the European Commission and the consultative members. It would not have been possible without addressing common challenges for the development of common policies as well as for mutual policy learning through European cooperation. We thank the academic community for its commitment to making the EHEA a reality and we acknowledge the need to create a more supportive working environment. The EHEA is a framework that underlines what we have in common as Europeans while also allowing individual systems and institutions to draw on their particular strengths and traditions.

**Our main challenges**

As the EHEA reaches maturity, public authorities and the academic community of students and staff need to reinforce our dialogue and cooperation to ensure that higher education is able to face to the challenges of a new age. The EHEA has created a new dynamism in European higher education. We need to take a new look at how education reforms can help develop the society we want.

Much remains to be done. We still do not see a truly trust-based, open EHEA without obstacles to mobility, recognition or cross-border quality assurance. In some policy areas, such as the development and self-certification of qualifications frameworks, the practical implementation of the legal framework for recognition, and equity in access to and completion of higher education, many of our countries have yet to reach our goals. We also note that some countries need to improve implementation in several policy areas. We will strive to improve implementation across the EHEA. .

At the same time, our societies face profound changes which impact on higher education, such as demographic changes, new technological developments, economic crises and an increased propensity for political and religious extremism. We strongly believe that higher education has a crucial role to play in addressing these challenges. As we have since 1999, we, the Ministers, commit to facing these challenges at EHEA level. But we also wish to stimulate a bottom-up approach through cross-border partnerships between institutions and pilot projects. Higher education institutions are drivers of change, constantly promoting innovation in teaching and research. Such innovation can only succeed through active cooperation with students and staff, and society at large and requires sustainable public investment for higher education across Europe.

**Achievements since 2012**

Considerable progress has been made since 2012. We endorse the reports by the working groups on implementation, structural reforms, mobility and internationalization, and the social dimension and lifelong learning as well as the pathfinder group on automatic recognition, the revised ECTS Users’ Guide and the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) and. adopt the recommendations outlined in the Appendix.

**Where we intend to go: priorities for 2020 and beyond**

Implementing our structural reforms at national and institutional level in cooperation with the academic community remains our highest priority. The reforms must be underpinned by shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and the academic community, to ensuring reforms are implemented coherently. At national level, we will work to remove obstacles to recognition and cooperation across borders. We ask the BFUG to organize a dialogue with our colleagues in the respective ministries that regulate professional recognition.

The successful implementation of structural reforms relies on high quality teaching and learning. We will work to ensure that sound structures support pedagogical innovation and student centred learning. Higher education will make full use of the possibilities offered by modern technology and methods while paying particular attention to the quality of new modes of teaching and learning. It should use innovative methods to promote active learning in an inclusive environment, encouraging interaction between teacher and student. Our teacher education programmes must integrate these possibilities and encourage the mobility of their students.

The economic crisis that Europe is facing clearly demonstrates that higher education improves the employability of graduates. Higher education must provide its graduates with the competences and skills not only to obtain a first employment but also to create their own jobs and to continue to develop their competences throughout their lives. Employability as well as entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainability should be embedded in the curriculum. This can be supported by stronger links between research and teaching at all levels of education, ensuring that that all graduates have personal experience of applying research methods and by internationalizing our higher education further.

We will develop public policies that encourage higher education institutions to reinforce their dialogue with the world of work and play their full role as institutions of lifelong learning. Together with institutions we will make use of reliable and meaningful information on graduates’ career paths.

Europe is facing conflict within and between EHEA members as well as with other parts of the world. We will develop public policies to enable higher education to help our societies develop a culture of democracy and dialogue. Higher education must prepare graduates to look at issues from several points of view, to mediate between opposing views, and to develop a strong commitment to democratic values. We will seek to develop mobility opportunities for student and staff from conflict areas and to foster academic cooperation.

**How we intend to achieve our goals**

*Modernizing EHEA tools*

We encourage stakeholders to apply tools such as the ESG, the European Approach to Joint Degrees and the ECTS Users’ Guide, adopted today. We also ask relevant stakeholders to modernize other tools, such as the Diploma Supplement; to develop new tools, such as a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention to further the recognition of prior leaning; and to further develop promising projects, for example on automatic recognition.

#### Strengthening our working methods

We recognize that to reach common goals and implement common policies in the specific context of each of our countries may be challenging. We will address these challenges through peer-learning activities, targeted support, pilot projects and greater use of task forces, expert and pathfinder groups, and we will draw on the insights of higher education researchers.

It is of particular importance to support member states experiencing difficulties in implementing commonly agreed goals. We ask the BFUG to offer policy dialogue to countries experiencing such difficulties and to report back to us on progress in time for our 2018 conference.

We acknowledge that the efforts to communicate the vision of the European Higher Education Area to the academic community and by other actors need to be improved. Therefore, we will communicate the common European vision more efficiently, and we will support broader participation to develop a stronger feeling of ownership of the EHEA.

We welcome the outline of the work programme for 2015 – 18 submitted to us and ask the BFUG to finalize it at its meeting in September 2015 on the basis of our decisions in Yerevan.

*A shared responsibility governed efficiently*

We recognize that insufficient implementation will threaten the credibility of the EHEA. We need stronger and more efficient monitoring of performance, broader statistical coverage by Eurostat, and complementary in-depth reporting from countries, also involving stakeholder organizations in country responses.

We commit to working with stakeholders at national level to address implementation gaps identified in the 2015 Implementation report. We ask the BFUG to present a report on this exercise in time for our 2018 conference.

The governance of the EHEA must develop to meet the challenges of ensuring coherent implementation of joint policies throughout a diverse EHEA. We ask the BFUG to review its governance and report back to us in time for our 2018 conference. Proposals should consider options for establishing a more international Secretariat with the possibility of a mandate extending beyond the following ministerial conference.

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We welcome [AA, BB] as new members of the European Higher Education Area. We take this opportunity to underline the importance of all members and consultative members participating fully in the work of the BFUG and contributing to the EHEA work programme.

We gratefully accept the invitation by France to host our next meeting in 2018 and to provide the Secretariat of the EHEA from July 2015 through 2018. We welcome the offer by France to include seconded officials from other EHEA members in this Secretariat.

## Appendix

### The Ministers

#### adopt:

* the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)
* the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes
* the revised ECTS Users’ Guide and make it an official EHEA document
* guidelines for staff mobility
* guidelines for the portability of grants and loans

*decide:*

* to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) based on the Dublin descriptorfor short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG.

#### commit to:

* ensuring that competence requirements for public employment ensure fair access to public employment for holders of first degrees and encourage employers to make appropriate use of higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle.
* ensuring, together with institutions, reliable and meaningful information on graduates’ career patterns in order to improve institutional self-knowledge and to obtain data on graduates’ progression to the labour market, which should be provided to potential students, their parents and society at large.
* reviewing their national legislation with a view to:
* fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, report to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016, and ask the Convention Committee in cooperation with the ENIC and NARIC Networks to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017, taking due account of the monitoring of the Convention carried out by the Convention Committee;
* removing any obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning;
* reviewing their national qualifications frameworks with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;
* supporting and promoting the full implementation of the ESG
* ensuring that higher education institutions across the EHEA are able to choose their external quality assurance provider from among EQAR-registered agencies without additional restrictions;
* building on the report by the Pathfinder Group and the examples of good practice in this report to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are recognized on an equal level with domestic qualifications.
* eliminating at system level, obstacles to recognition and cooperation across borders, in particular through the removal of administrative barriers to offering joint programmes and awarding joint degrees.
* making our higher education mores socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy

*ask*:

* the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO to review the Diploma Supplement and to ensure the adoption of the same revised version in both frameworks
* the *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* to consider whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed on the recognition of prior learning and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by 2018
* the European Commission to support further projects to improve the automatic recognition of qualifications at system level.

and *take note* of the outline work programme for 2015 – 18 and ask the BFUG to finalize it in line with the priorities set out this Communiqué.