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**YEREVAN COMMUNIQUE REVISED DRAFT FOLLOWING THE BFUG DEBATE 26 01 15**

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

The EHEA has become a reality, and we are proud of our joint achievements over the past 16 years, developed through open dialogue and cooperation between the 47 member states, the European Commission, and the consultative members, institutions, their students and staff.

The EHEA is now at a turning point.

We, as Ministers, meeting in Yerevan on 14-15 May 2015:

reaffirm our commitment to an area of higher education in which students and staff can move freely with full and fair recognition of their qualifications as well as 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.

Looking forward to 2020 we commit to taking up the challenges of a rapidly changing landscape in which higher education is ever more important in promoting social cohesion and developing human potential. We will continue our partnership in support of creativity, quality and innovation in our higher education systems and in society at large.

**A new reality – challenges (and opportunities)**

Midway through the second decade of C21 in which Europe faces a context of demographic decline, continued financial and economic crisis as well as rapid technological change, investment in human capital, research & innovation is crucial to our economic and social development.

Moreover cultural diversity is increasingly a feature of our European societies. Migration and immigration are both a social reality and often also an economic necessity. This opens new horizons for both, students and staff. Higher education needs to respond to the changing nature of our societies, ensuring equal opportunities to access and complete higher education for all those who are qualified to do so.

As mobility and cooperation increases, we encourage the higher education systems of the EHEA to continue to build bridges between academic communities, and to strengthen dialogue, exchange and collaboration in times of regional tensions and crisis in a spirit of mutual respect.

In this rapidly changing environment it is more important than ever to continue to develop our higher education systems so that they will be equipped to address the next generation of learners that are currently in primary and secondary education. This requires vision and planning for the future, that can only be developed for Europe through the continuation of the Bologna Process, in dialogue and collaboration between higher systems and institutions, policy makers and the higher education community, among 48 participating countries, but also in exchange with partners around the globe.

Closer and more networked cooperation between public authorities and the academic community, including university leaders, students and staff, will be of crucial importance for reinforcing dialogue and cooperation and ensuring that our higher education systems are able to face the challenges of a new age. We also recognize that we need to: share more widely our vision and aims for the EHEA, explain better to stakeholders both within and outside of higher education, including employers and public opinion, as well as provide support to those countries that seek to improve the implementation of change in specific areas.

Higher education institutions are drivers of change, constantly reinventing themselves and promoting innovation in teaching and research. This can only succeed in active collaboration with students and staff, and society at large. This requires further sustained public funding 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 adopt the recommendations outlined in the Appendix (drawing particular attention to the importance for all partners of the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)?. These are important instruments for higher education, and also building blocks for the EHEA’s future development.

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

Implementing structural reforms at institutional level in cooperation with the academic community remains our highest priority. This implies political ownership of the reforms and commitment on the part of institutions, staff and students:

* Qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, recognition, credit systems, inter-institutional cooperation on joint programmes must be implemented in all EHEA countries.
* High quality learning and teaching is of the utmost importance, and we will work to ensure that there is support for student centred learning, more flexible learning paths, pedagogical innovation and staff development. Connecting learning and teaching to research at all levels is also of major importance as we move forward. We further encourage higher education institutions to further develop technology- assisted learning as a means of opening up opportunities for different learning experiences
* Particular attention will be paid to ensuring that teacher education programmes integrate these possibilities and also encourage the mobility of their students.
* Renewed emphasis will be placed on improving the employability of graduates. Higher education must provide its graduates with the competences and skills, not only to obtain initial employment but also to continue to develop their competences throughout their lives, and to be entrepreneurial, and thus able to create jobs themselves.
* There is also a need to put increased attention on the transition from school into higher education. This is pioneered by institutions and systems, and would benefit from a European approach.
* At the same time we will develop public policies providing incentives for higher education institutions to reinforce their dialogue with the world of work and play their full role as institutions of lifelong learning.
* We will also work together to develop policies promoting a democratic culture, greater intercultural dialogue and more openness, and encourage higher education institutions to prepare their graduates to think critically, with a strong commitment to democratic principles and ethical values. We will pay special attention to developing mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas.
* Digitalisation is of growing importance for our institutions and our societies. We are committed to ensuring that Bologna policies and tools support and further this development, and that digitalisation becomes an element of all Bologna action lines.
* Internationalisation?

**How we intend to achieve our goals**

*Modernizing EHEA tools*

We will encourage all stakeholders to use the tools adopted today (cf. Appendix). 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 working methods, such as projects on automatic recognition.

#### Strengthening our working methods

We recognize that to reach common goals while also implementing common policies in the specific context of each of our countries may sometimes be challenging. We will address these challenges through peer-learning activities, targeted support where necessary, and pilot projects and will also support, through dialogue, member states experiencing difficulties in implementing commonly agreed goals.

We welcome 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 measurement of performance, broader statistical coverage by Eurostat, and more in depth reporting from countries, also involving stakeholder organizations in country responses. We will continue to develop our working methods, e.g. through greater use of pathfinder groups enabling volunteering countries to develop examples of good practice that can serve as the basis for further policy development.

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 progress 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 include options for establishing a more international Secretariat with 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 2108. 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.
* 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 programs and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of 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;
* 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.
* making our higher education mores socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy

*ask*:

* the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO along with the Bologna Consulative Members 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 should 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.