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*Draft communiqué*

We, the Ministers, meeting in Yerevan on 14-15 May 2015, are proud to recognize that the vision which inspired our predecessors in Bologna has given rise to a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), where 47 countries with different political, cultural and academic traditions cooperate on the basis of open dialogue, shared goals and common commitments. Together we are engaged in a process of voluntary convergence and coordinated reform of our higher education systems, based on a common degree structure, a shared understanding of principles and processes for quality assurance and recognition, and a number of other common tools. Thanks to these reforms, progress has been made in enabling students and graduates to move within the EHEA with recognition of their qualifications and periods of study; study programmes are geared to permit access to the European labour market; institutions are becoming more and more active in an international context; and academics cooperate in joint research and teaching programmes. The EHEA has opened a dialogue with other regions of the world and is perceived as a good model of structured cooperation.

Nonetheless, we know that implementation of the structural reforms is uneven, that the tools are not always used correctly, and that continuing renewal of our higher education systems and greater involvement of academic communities is necessary to achieve the full potential of the EHEA. We are committed to completing the work, and recognize the need to give new impulse to our cooperation.

Today, the EHEA faces new challenges. European countries are confronted with a continuing economic and social crisis, dramatic levels of unemployment, increasing marginalization of young people, demographic changes, new migration patterns, and conflicts within and between countries, as well as political extremism. At the same time, greater mobility of students and staff fosters mutual knowledge and understanding, while rapid technological developments, which have an impact on societies and economies, also play an increasingly important role in the transformation of higher education.

We are convinced that the EHEA has a key role to play in addressing these challenges and maximizing these opportunities through European collaboration and exchange, by pursuing common goals, and in dialogue with partners around the globe. We must renew our original vision and consolidate the EHEA structure. Our achievements over the past years give us the confidence to move ahead.

**A renewed vision: our priorities**

By 2020 we envision an EHEA where our common goals are implemented in all EHEA countries, ensuring  trust in each other’s higher education systems, where  automatic recognition has become a reality so that students can move easily throughout it,  where  higher education is contributing effectively to build inclusive societies, founded on democratic values and human rights, and graduates are offered educational opportunities that provide the competences and skills required for European citizenship and employment.

In the coming years our priorities will be to pursue these goals in the new context.

* **Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching** is the main mission of the EHEA. We will encourage and support higher education institutions in promoting pedagogical innovation in student-centred learning environments and in fully exploiting the potential benefits of digital technologies for learning and teaching in all higher education activities. Higher education programmes should enable students to develop the competences that can best satisfy personal aspirations and societal needs, through effective learning activities supported by transparent descriptions of learning outcomes and workload, flexible learning paths and appropriate teaching/assessment methods. It is essential to recognize and reward good teaching, and to provide opportunities for enhancing academics’ teaching competences. Moreover, students should be responsibly involved in curriculum design and in the quality assurance of the programmes.

* **Connecting learning achievements with employment or self-employment opportunities** is a major goal for the EHEA at a time of high unemployment. We need to ensure that, at the end of each cycle of study, graduates possess competences suitable for entry into the labour market which also enable them to develop the new competences they may need for employment or self-employment in the course of their working lives. We will reward higher education institutions that strengthen their dialogue with employers, implement competence-based programmes and follow graduates’ career developments. We will promote a stronger link between learning and research at all study levels, and incentivize institutions, teachers and students to intensify activities that develop creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. We will promote international mobility for study and placement as a powerful means to expand the range of competences and the work options for students.
* **Making our systems more inclusive** is an essential aim for the EHEA as our populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic change. We undertake to widen participation in higher education and provide relevant activities for different types of learners in appropriate learning contexts. We intend to enhance opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We will develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of learning which has taken place in informal or non-formal settings. We ask higher education to promote intercultural understanding, political and religious tolerance, and democratic and civic values, in order to strengthen European and global citizenship and lay the foundations for inclusive societies.
* **Implementing agreed structural reforms** is a prerequisite for the consolidation of the EHEA and, in the long run, for its survival. A common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance and recognition procedures, cooperation for mobility and joint programmes are the foundations of the EHEA. Full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level requires shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and academic communities, as well as better communication with all stakeholders. Non-implementation in some countries may undermine the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA. We need more precise measurement of performance and more in-depth reporting from member countries. We will provide targeted support to member countries experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals, based on policy dialogue and exchange of good practice.

**The governance and working methods of the EHEA must develop to meet these challenges**. We ask the BFUG to review and adapt its governance and working methods, to involve higher education practitioners in its work program, and for our next meeting to submit proposals for addressing the issue of non-implementation of key commitments.

We gratefully accept the commitment of France to host our next meeting in 2018 and to provide the Secretariat of the EHEA from July 2015 through June 2018.

We welcome [AA, BB] as new members of the European Higher Education Area.

Finally, we endorse the reports by the working groups on Implementation, Structural reforms, Mobility and internationalization, and the Social dimension and lifelong learning. We adopt the measures included in the Appendix and 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 program.

***Appendix***

1. **Policy measures adopted**

* 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, as an official EHEA document

1. **Commitments**

* to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), based on the Dublin descriptorsfor short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG.
* to ensure that competence requirements for public employment allow for fair access to holders of first degrees, and encourage employers to make appropriate use of all higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle.
* to ensure, in collaboration with institutions, reliable and meaningful information on graduates’ career patterns, in order to improve institutional self-knowledge and obtain data on graduates’ progression in the labour market, which should be provided to potential students, their parents and society at large.
* to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, reporting to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016, and asking 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;
* to remove 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;
* to review national qualifications frameworks, with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning.
* to follow the guidelines for staff mobility
* to follow the guidelines for the portability of grants and loans
* to making our higher education mores socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy