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BFUG MEETING

Sofia (Bulgaria), 5-6 February 2018

Draft Minutes

0. List of Participants

Delegation	Last name	First name
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Austria	Bacher	Gottfried
Austria	Dulmovits	Stephan
Azerbaijan	Bayramov	Shahin
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Belgium fr.	Hollela	Caroline
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BFUG Secretariat	Saad	Mariana
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Bulgaria	Yotova-Bakalova	Yana
Council of Europe	Bergan	Sjur
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Cyprus	Papoulas	Andreas
Czech Republic	Fliegl	Tomáš
Denmark	Ulf-Møller	Maria
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Education International	Roman	Agnes
ENQA	Grolimund	Christoph
ENQA	Kelo	Maria
EQAR	Dittrich	Karl
EQAR	Tück	Colin
Estonia	Haidak	Margus

Estonia	Pukk	Janne
ESU	Gajek	Adam
ESU	Schwitters	Helge
ESU	Sundberg	Caroline
EUA	Gaebel	Michael
EUA	Wilson	Lesley
EURASHE	Karpíšek	Michal
EURASHE	Lauwick	Stephane
Euridyce	Crosier	David
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European Commission	Engels-Perenyi	Klara
European Commission	Szuly	Kinga
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Finland	Vuorinen	Birgitta
France	Desprésaux	Denis
France	Lagier	Hélène
France Vice-chair	Ott	Marie-Odile
Georgia	Margvelashvili	Maia
Germany	Greisler	Peter
Germany	Lüddeke	Barbara
Germany	Petrikowski	Frank
Holy See	Bechina	Friedrich
Hungary	Keszei	Ernő
Iceland	Vidarsdottir	Una
Ireland	Gleeson	Joseph
Italy	Castellucci	Paola
Italy	Cinquepalmi	Federico
Italy	Lantero	Luca
Italy	Lucke	Vera
Latvia	Ivsina	Daiga
Liechtenstein	Miescher	Daniel
Lithuania	Sirkaite	Aurelija
Lithuania	Viliūnas	Giedrius
Luxembourg	Kox	Corinne
Malta	Sammut-Bonnici	Tanya
Moldova	Velisco	Nadejda
Montenegro	Misovic	Biljana
Netherlands	Bijvank	Tessa
Netherlands	Heemskerk	Renske
Norway	Johansson	Toril
Norway	Strøm	Tone Flood
Poland	Banaszak	Bartłomiej
Poland	Boltruszko	Maria

Portugal	Feyo de Azevedo	Sebastião
Portugal	Martins	Afonso D'Oliveira
Portugal	Queiroz	João
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Romania	Toma	Antonela
Russian Federation	Ganshin	Igor
Russian Federation	Kamynina	Nadezda
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Slovenia	Rustja	Erika
Spain	de Lezcano-Mújica	Margarita
Sweden	Bringle	Sara
Switzerland	Studinger	Silvia
TFYROM	Aleksov	Borcho
Turkey	Mandal	Hasan
Ukraine	Novosad	Ganna
UNESCO	Snildal	Andreas
United Kingdom	Wilkinson	Pamela

Apologies: Greece

1. Welcome and introduction to the meeting

Denitsa Sacheva, Deputy Minister of Education and Science in Bulgaria, opened the meeting and welcomed the BFUG delegates. Investment in growth and jobs, digital competences, modernisation of higher education are amongst the priorities of the Bulgarian EU Presidency. As shaping the future of the EHEA is the task for the BFUG, she hoped for visible and sustainable results and clear messages from this meeting.

The outgoing Co-chairs (Estonia, Russia) thanked the Bulgarian Co-chair for hosting this meeting, the Vice-chair, the Secretariat and one another for the co-operation. The outgoing Co-chair (Russia) underlined the importance of digitalisation and further development of the process. The Co-chair (Serbia) thanked Bulgaria for the co-operation and announced the next Board meeting in Belgrade for 15 March. The Vice-chair thanked Bulgaria for hosting two meetings during this period.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

3. Feedback of the last meetings

The outgoing Co-chair (Estonia) gave a short overview of the discussion at the BFUG meeting in Tartu in November 2017. In addition to discussing results from the Advisory and Working Groups, non-implementation, fundamental values and the draft Communiqué had been important issues. Board members underlined that minutes needed to be balanced and referred to their written comments. Regarding the draft minutes, the Secretariat explained that for the final version comments would be taken into account as far as contradicting positions allow.

The Co-chair (Serbia) reported that results from the Advisory and Working Groups were the core of the Board meeting as well, together with the draft Communiqué. She announced that BFUG members would be invited to send written comments on the next draft Communiqué in February.

4. Update and discussion concerning the AG/WG work on Implementation and Non-implementation

4.1. Implementation Report (WG1 Monitoring)

The WG1 chair (Norway) reported that comments on the draft Bologna Process Implementation report had been received from most countries, and that a pre-final draft would be sent by the end of February, with only one week for quick comments. The final report could be expected by the end of March. The WG1 chair (Eurydice) announced to concentrate his presentation on the three key commitments to give a first overview of the results.

He reported that 38 countries conform to all the main commitments regarding the degree structure, whereas 10 need to address major issues (mostly still offering too many long/integrated programmes).

A national qualifications framework is in place in most countries, but some countries still face major tasks ahead. About 20 countries are not using ECTS correctly for all purposes, especially not always checking the use of ECTS with external quality assurance. While the main principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention generally are not integrated into legislative frameworks except in some countries, ensuring that legislation is respected is a challenge in many countries. For quality assurance, a positive picture for the European Standards and Guidelines can be drawn; however, some countries would need support with some aspects of quality assurance.

In conclusion, some developments since Yerevan are visible, but few countries completed all the issues. The WG1 chair (Eurydice) added that beyond the three key commitments, there will be interesting findings on other topics in the report, and reminded delegations of the short time for comments on the pre-draft report at the end of February.

BFUG members discussed how to give an adequate picture. As agreed in Amsterdam, contrasting information would be helpful to understand the major issues and improve further work at national level. Some BFUG members stressed the importance of validation of data by the countries. The Council of Europe explained that implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles is uneven from country to country, but also regarding different parts of the Convention. Some major shortcomings will not be visible from the results of the Implementation Report. It was pointed out that the ECTS slide showing the European Standards and Guidelines 2015 was based on aspects which are not mentioned in the ECTS Users' Guide but in other documents.

The WG1 chair (Eurydice) responded that some questions addressed these issues on a more general level and that information would be available in the next version of the report. The Co-chair (Serbia) reminded that this version would be available by the end of February.

4.2. Proposal for a 2018-2020 report (WG1 Monitoring)

The WG1 chair (Eurydice) explained that due to the shorter working period (two years), efforts for updates on all indicators would not be worthwhile. Instead of showing the state of play one year later, it was proposed to concentrate on a few politically important issues and to look at progress over time (since the respective issues had come up in the Bologna Process). The number of issues would need to be restricted to no more than 100 indicators. The WG1 chair asked if WG1 may decide on what is worth looking at and propose some issues which are more important. He proposed not to take a decision during the meeting, but to mandate the group with making proposals for the first BFUG meeting after the Paris Ministerial Conference.

Many BFUG members welcomed the proposal of looking at fewer issues over the period 1999-2020. The three key commitments, recommendations which will have been made in the Paris Communiqué, and goals or ambitions for the future should be the starting point for this report, which should also analyse the first results of the new peer approach. The BFUG thanked WG1 for all their work.

The WG1 chairs thanked for the support and confirmed that the countries would be consulted for published data. Nevertheless, they will not be asked to correct data from other sources (e.g. data provided by students should not be corrected by governments). Various sources will be used as a starting point, and the WG will try to link best to other relevant structures and sources. The goal is to have an objective perspective of what has happened, and to validate data, whereas the interpretation of all data will be up to the BFUG.

4.3. Summary of the Final Report and recommendations from AG2 (Support for the Belarus Roadmap)

The AG2 chair (Germany) thanked the group for the work on the Belarus roadmap and the events organised in the last two years. He emphasised that the presented final report will be complemented with a quotation from the Yerevan Communiqué and that the proposal of the AG2 chairs was to offer a specific support procedure for Belarus during the next working period. The AG2 chair (Holy See)

underlined that rules must be the same for all countries and that no reform can happen without the country itself being convinced for it; therefore the ideal scenario would be that Belarus itself presents its own ambitious roadmap.

Some BFUG members wanted to avoid different procedures and suggested a national action plan for every country to identify its needs. They insisted on the fact that being a full member, Belarus should not follow a different procedure for one more period. Other BFUG members referred to the decision of Ministers taken in Yerevan to invite Belarus under specific conditions which imply that the roadmap had to be followed until it would be regarded as being fulfilled. The concerns of Ministers in Yerevan had been about fundamental values and not only about structural reforms.

Several delegations underlined that they all want to support Belarus in implementing and fulfilling the roadmap, and expressed the view that Belarus could gain a lot by being supported during the next working period. Some members were in favour of applying a specific procedure therefor, others referred to the new approach for peer support. Some delegates underlined that linking support only to the three key commitments would be too narrow, as the roadmap is looking at a much broader picture. BFUG members underlined that to become, stay or be an attractive higher education area, being inclusive is important, while, at the same time, agreed values have to be implemented and respected. ESU called for flexible learning conditions for students, and equal treatment of all teachers, students and staff in higher education institutions, regardless of their political engagement.

The Belarus delegate asked for equal treatment for her country. She explained that while the new law is under discussion at the Parliament, they were aware the ambitious roadmap had not been fully implemented yet and that there is still a lot to be done; but it was not only a matter of a roadmap implemented on time, and more time is needed for practical, doable, workable solutions in academic contexts. Whatever would be developed for non-implementation countries, Belarus expressed its willingness to take part. At the same time, being treated on equal terms would be a strong motivation for the Belarus academic community.

The BFUG Co-chairs asked the AG2 chairs to revise the recommendations in the light of the remarks made during the discussion. The AG2 chair (Germany) argued that the report would not be changed since it was agreed by all the AG2 members.

The Co-chair (Bulgaria) invited the Belarus delegation to clarify how far the country would be open to continue work on mobility and social dimension. She announced to wait for an action plan from Belarus and – if necessary – to discuss it during the next BFUG meeting.

4.4. Joint proposal AG3 (Dealing with non-implementation)/WG2 (Implementation)

The AG3 chair (Iceland) explained the documents provided by WG2 and AG3. Based on the concepts of peer support, inclusiveness and key commitments, they proposed autonomous peer support groups on the three key commitments which should involve all member countries of the BFUG. All countries should self-identify their potential for each key commitment, and the groups should decide how to proceed. The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) should co-ordinate exchange of the three groups, chaired by someone not chairing any of the three peer groups. Every group would be responsible collectively for the goal(s) of the respective key commitments.

Many delegations welcomed the joint proposal, viewed the idea of shared responsibility as key, and some delegations declared to be willing to engage in the process. Some delegations had additional questions, e.g. regarding the relation between the BFUG and the co-ordination group, the selection of its members, or the participation of non-EU countries. Some delegations questioned the relevance of such a new working group and pointed out governance issues, recalling that it was the BFUG's task to follow up implementation in the EHEA member countries and expressed concerns about peer groups which would not report directly to the BFUG or to Chairs' meetings and about a possible hierarchy appearing between "good" and "bad" countries. The European Commission underlined that non-Erasmus countries will be able to participate in peer support activities from Erasmus countries and be funded through the programme, and reminded the BFUG that the ground for starting the work needs to be prepared now, e.g. to cater for inclusion in the Erasmus+ call for proposals: launch of the call by the end of June, submission by the end of August and contractualisation by the end of the year.

The AG3 chair (Iceland) underlined that monitoring would be done neither by the peer groups nor the BICG, but by the regular monitoring tools. The peer-learning should feed back to the BFUG in a way which is looking at the EHEA and not at individual countries. Over the time, key commitments might change, but the process could be used as a tool for other key commitments. The WG2 chairs explained that the peer groups would not be working groups in the sense of the WGs which exist at the moment. The peer groups would organise the collaborative work on a given key commitment (in direction of the countries), and the report of all groups (in the direction of the BFUG). The AG3 chair (Iceland) agreed to

rephrase the texts using "following" instead of "monitoring". The WG2 chair (B fl.) explained that the peer groups will not report on implementation, but on the peer learning experience and asked to approve this proposal with the changes and let the 4-5 people start the work.

The Co-chair (Bulgaria) asked the chairs of WG2 and AG3 to review the wording of the terms of reference, and to draft a clear call for expression of interest to be sent to the BFUG. Thus, the first part of the roadmap from page 4 of document 4c has been adopted.

4. Update and discussion concerning the AG/WG work on the Future of the EHEA

4.5. Summary of the Final Report from AG4 (Diploma Supplement revision)

The AG4 chair (Romania) referred to the changes made since the last BFUG meeting (highlighted in document [BFUG BG SR 58 4i](#)).

The Council of Europe referred to the final procedure for adoption of the Diploma Supplement in all of the three frameworks. The BFUG members appreciated the necessary but few changes and proposed a few minor changes in the wording, especially in order to make it acceptable for non-European countries. The European Commission reminded participants of the fact that the Diploma Supplement should be used for informal learning as well, and called for digitalisation of the documents.

The AG4 chair took note of the comments provided.

4.6. Proposal for the Bologna Policy Forum (AG1 EHEA international co-operation)

The Vice-chair (France) explained that AG1 had drafted a Concept Note as a basis for round tables and that the other [document](#) is a very first draft of the Bologna Policy Forum Statement, which had not yet been commented by AG1 members. They would work on this at their next meeting in February 2018. She informed that invitations to countries had been sent and that the Director-General of UNESCO has been invited as keynote speaker.

BFUG members asked for a list of invited Ministers from third countries; this would be sent to them.

5. Programme for the Ministerial Conference 2018

The Vice-chair (France) explained the programme and recalled that the aim is to adopt every part of the Communiqué with the corresponding session of the Ministerial Conference.

France underlined that BFUG members have to present the draft Communiqué to their Ministers before the Ministerial Conference in order to start from an (almost) agreed draft Communiqué. At the beginning of the Ministerial Conference, this version should be presented and it should be made clear which part will be discussed within which session.

Several parties stated that they do not agree with this approach, and that it does not align with the way how Bologna Ministerial Conferences are organised and the Communiqué is adopted by Ministers. Ministers should be given the chance to exchange on the Communiqué on both days of the Conference. Several delegations stated that they would prefer more time in the programme for discussing the Communiqué.

6. Discussion on the topic "Towards European universities"

Based on the note which had been circulated to the BFUG, and as a round table is proposed at the agenda of the Conference, the Vice-chair (France) explained that key issues for this discussion should be identified. President Macron had proposed to develop closer cross-border co-operation with "European Universities" based on networks of higher education institutions across Europe, a proposal which was later adopted by the Council of Ministers in its Conclusions in December last year. The European Commission recalled their suggestion which had been made in November 2017 in the context of three 2025 proposals. More open programmes that would allow participation in parts of a course in certain foreign institutions, might be helpful in providing an international experience for a larger group of students.

BFUG members welcomed several aspects of the initiative, e.g. digitalisation, or long-term strategies for education and research, and proposed to build on joint programmes and joint degrees. At the same time, they asked for further clarification of the concept in comparison to the many "European Universities" and bottom-up networks of institutions that already exist, and for the added value. Some expressed the opinion that the quality of teaching and mobility generally should be very high in all EHEA institutions. Therefore, embracing the quality in all institutions should be the aim of the EHEA instead of creating a circle of particular quality. Some participants missed key words like critical thinking, democracy and

human rights. Others were concerned about the geographical balance and wanted the background papers to clearly state that all EHEA higher education institutions can participate as equal partners, and to explain how non-EU institutions will be financed. One major concern was that this proposal could lead to an EHEA inside the EHEA with excellence clusters.

The European Commission underlined the importance of being inclusive and geographically balanced. Calls should allow flexibility for higher education institutions in terms of agreeing on topics or fields and, in terms of financing, possible synergies with Horizon 2020 and the Structural Funds should be considered.

The Co-chair (Bulgaria) thanked all participants for the lively discussion and many suggestions made.

7. Update on the Ministerial Conference 2018

The BFUG Secretariat presented the logo of the conference and explained its main ideas linked to the conference: collective action, dynamism, democracy and openness.

On 23 May, the Welcoming Ceremony and Cocktail dinner will take place at the Sorbonne. The venue for the conference itself is the Palais Brongniart and the Gala Dinner 24 May will be at the Théâtre National de Chaillot.

The registration platform's address is eha2018.paris, personal access codes would be sent on 19 February. Hotels had been pre-reserved; delegations were advised to book as soon as possible. Members not having informed the Secretariat yet about the composition of their delegation have been invited once more to do it.

8. Draft for the 2018 Ministerial Communiqué

The BFUG Vice-chair as the Drafting Committee chair presented the draft version 3.0 of the Ministerial Communiqué and informed that comments from the Board meeting and other comments received had been integrated.

Austria explained the message it had sent to all BFUG members. The main idea was to arrive at a shorter text with a clearer structure after the discussion during this meeting. Austria proposed to send this version 4.0 to BFUG members, and allowing one week for written comments. Working on the wording should be postponed until having version 5.0 after the Board meeting in March (which then could be discussed at the April BFUG meeting).

A large number of BFUG members supported the approach of shortening and focusing on a limited number of concrete action lines. They especially called for rewriting the second part, for avoiding banalities and any repetition, and for limiting the text to no more than three pages (with background information either be deleted or transferred to the annex). The more structured document should have a clear message underlining the two central aspects: the importance of fundamental values and implementation. Fundamental values (not just "values") should be described and linked to citizenship and democracy. Some delegations insisted on mentioning the lack of implementation and the proposal for a follow-up on the Belarus roadmap, and on emphasising the need of speeding up implementation in all 48 EHEA countries. Others pointed out the inclusiveness agenda together with lifelong learning, including "diversity" as an umbrella notion and flexible learning paths, while ESU stressed the need to have a more ambitious agenda on LLL and social dimension.

Some delegations perceived the paragraph on teaching and learning as being too weak and were in favour of a strategic approach, embracing facets like digitalisation, social dimension, student centred learning, and diversity. European higher education institutions have a task for digitalisation of societies at large. The European dimension as a vision should be better articulated in context with local and regional ambitions. Others suggested mentioning linking of EHEA and ERA with a concrete proposal (e.g. a concrete vision for 2020 on how to improve inclusion of research in higher education). This collaboration could be linked to the idea of "European universities" in line with the discussion on point 6, underlining inclusiveness and commitments.

In general, it was recommended to come up with a more political and more ambitious Communiqué providing a vision for the next two years, including concrete commitments and ways to achieve them. Instead of higher education in general, activities in and of the EHEA would have to be at the core of the text which should make stakeholders feel their role in the reforms. In line with the political nature of the text it was proposed to use "we commit to" or "we ensure" instead of "we promote" or "we believe", and "diversity" was suggested as an umbrella instead of "inclusiveness". Using a stronger wording was felt necessary, especially for implementation issues.

Norway underlined that the Drafting Committee was and will be proposing a revised text, but that the BFUG as a whole now needs to take the ownership of the draft Communiqué.

After discussion with the BFUG, the BFUG Secretariat presented a revised roadmap with a new timeline which was adopted by the BFUG.

9. Draft Reports from the Consultative Members for the 2018 Ministerial Conference

BFUG members took note of the information provided.

10. AOB

10.1. Information on the European Student Card

The European Commission referred to the conclusions of the European Council of 14 December 2017 and to projects funded by the European Commission (Erasmus without paper, European Student Card and Emrex). France presented a [video](#) on the European Student Card pilot project aiming at making student mobility easier.

10.2. Information on the Bologna Researchers' Conference

Romania reported from the conference in November 2017 which highlighted main challenges of EHEA from a researchers' point of view. The results will be published in open access.

10.3. Invitation to a Cluster Meeting: Capitalising on the results of EHEA reforms implementation projects (funded by Erasmus+ KA3) on 12-13 March 2018

The European Commission announced the event with representatives from 23 countries participating in Erasmus involved in reform projects, discussing e.g. the three key commitments. Ministries have been invited to join the meeting to draw conclusions for their national policies.