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DRAFT STATEMENT OF THE FIFTH BOLOGNA POLICY FORUM

Version 06

We, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education, strongly support the continuing value that higher education brings to societies. In an increasingly interconnected and internationalised world higher education and research are central to our future prosperity, peace and progress. The Bologna Policy Forum in Paris in May 2018 has provided an important opportunity for a multilateral dialogue and exchange of ideas between members of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Ministers from other countries and a range of stakeholders. Following a fruitful discussion we have taken this opportunity to launch new initiatives that will support an ongoing dialogue between the EHEA and other countries and regions.

Higher education has a long tradition of forging international links and there are many examples of productive partnerships between our countries. Higher education institutions and stakeholders are among the key drivers of international cooperation through the mobility of staff and students, international research partnerships, transnational education and collaboration on reaching solutions to global challenges. In this way higher education has provided a strong basis for multilateral developments which are vital at a time when there are common challenges confronting our societies, such as rising populism, social exclusion, the displacement of peoples, youth unemployment and environmental issues.

The EHEA is an example of the kind of progress that can be made by bringing together a large number of countries acting on a voluntary basis. It has provided a framework and practical tools that have modernised and improved the quality of higher education provision – such as learning outcomes, the diploma supplement, qualifications frameworks, and quality enhancement and assurance. This approach has been adopted by other regions in South East Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean and Latin America which have all been actively engaged in the development of national or regional integrative instruments, such as quality frameworks, credit transfer systems, and qualifications frameworks, to strengthen quality and facilitate intra-regional recognition and mobility. The ASEM process should be mentioned as an example of a successful transnational cooperation initiative between Asia and Europe.

We believe that the Bologna Policy Forum supported by Ministers and international organisations, can bring about a more systematic and sustainable level of international cooperation. There is considerable diversity across our regions but coming together to understand the different domestic social and political contexts of higher education and to situate our experiences within the wider geopolitics of higher education has led to productive outcomes. It is important for those with responsibility for higher education to listen, learn and engage on common issues. These include quality, academic freedom, student participation, social inclusion, the status and autonomy of higher education institutions and the wider role of higher education institutions. The Fifth Bologna Policy Forum has initiated a global policy dialogue focussing on two of these common concerns - social inclusion and the wider civic role of higher education.

Although the percentage of the population attending higher education is growing in most countries, social inclusion and widening access to higher education is still a challenge across the world. Disadvantaged groups, including migrants and refugees, face additional challenges not only to access higher but also to succeed. The debate therefore about social inclusion is not just about 'fair access' it also about success in higher education – this includes retention, progression, successful completion and good employability for all our students.

Contemporary social challenges require local, regional and global engagement. We agree that higher education institutions can and should play a wider social, cultural and leadership role in their communities. Higher education institutions are vitally important in supporting the economies of their locality, region or country. In addition they can play a vital civic role helping to build social cohesion by providing students with values, skills and aptitudes that promote civic participation, social inclusion, sustainability and global citizenship.

We the Ministers commit to supporting this ongoing, successful interregional dialogue on issues of common concern amongst policy makers, stakeholder organisations, students, staff and higher education institutions. We support the establishment of a new Global Working Group to take this agenda forward and we invite countries to bid to hold high level workshops to continuing the dialogue on social inclusion and the wider role of higher education. We are committed to continuing to collaborate, to share experience and to identify future goals through joint workshops, conferences and importantly peer learning, so that higher education can continue to be a positive force for change.