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of the Council
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Ministry of
Education
and Culture



Draft 0 of the Ministerial Communiqué, Rome, 2020 *to be discussed in the Helsinki BFUG meeting*

Introduction

We, the Ministers responsible for higher education, meeting in Rome on 24 June 2020, celebrate the achievements of the past 21 years, since the signing of the Bologna Declaration, and affirm our deep commitment to the development of an ever stronger, more transparent, inclusive and functional European Higher Education Area. In light of the rapid and important changes taking place in our societies and economies, driven inter alia by rapid scientific and technological developments in many fields, we are convinced that the role of Higher Education in meeting the current and future challenges is vital. We look with both determination and optimism towards 2030, certain that we will be able to foster closer, more effective collaboration among our countries and with the global higher education world, in order to confront the changes ahead of us to the maximum benefit of our societies and citizens.

[To be developed according to the input of the discussion in the Helsinki BFUG meeting, etc]

[if approved: Based on our agreed criteria for country membership, we are pleased to welcome San Marino as a new member of the EHEA.]

Progress in implementing agreed reforms and reaching goals¹

In the relatively brief period between the present and the previous Ministerial Conference, held in Paris in 2018, many positive steps have been taken, and much has been accomplished. Members, consultative members and partner organizations have given renewed momentum to the process of achieving agreed reforms and developing a vision for the future of the EHEA.

We register with appreciation the results illustrated in the Bologna Process Implementation Report which, in this instance, focuses on examining in depth the progress in implementation achieved by member countries in certain areas...*[we do not have the relevant information yet, and so cannot say more for now]*

A particularly significant result of the 2018 Paris Conference was the decision to devote special effort to ensuring compliance of all countries with three "Key Commitments" essential for the functioning of the systemic aspects of the EHEA, and to create a Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG), entrusted with developing peer support mechanisms to facilitate their full implementation.

The resulting three Thematic Peer Groups have proved to be effective not only in assisting countries in implementing the agreed reforms, but also in developing a spirit of collaboration among countries and identifying new aspects to be addressed. The work of the Groups shows the usefulness of creating contexts where country representatives can discuss in detail and in a spirit of trust and

¹ The 2018 Paris Communiqué asked the BFUG to develop a Bologna Process Implementation Report assessing the main developments in the EHEA since the beginning of the Bologna Process.

transparency hands-on processes. The Ministers confirm the usefulness of the Peer Support method, ask the BFUG to continue to employ it, thank the EU Commission for funding many of the activities of the three Thematic Peer Groups, and hope that this support may continue.

[Here we intend to mention more specifically the achievements and proposals of the three TPG, A, B, and C]

We consider both the Social Dimension and Learning and Teaching to be *Core Commitments* of the EHEA, that lie at the very heart of all our efforts.

The Social Dimension implies inclusion of all components of society in appropriate and supportive ways. We call on universities to extend, adapt and vary their educational offer and provide counseling and support mechanisms. We wish to ensure not only that every person in our countries has access to higher education, but also that they will be able to achieve successfully the education they aspire to. The Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) aim to provide basic agreed principles that can lead to a better overall implementation of the Social Dimension, broadly understood, in the field of Higher Education.

Learning and Teaching comprise the continuing development of learning outcomes and competence-based student-centered learning, including appropriate assessment methods and increased support for teaching staff, as well as for all learners. Governments should support higher education institutions in developing and consolidating their approach to student-centred learning and promoting varied and interactive teaching practices by creating the necessary enabling regulatory and funding environment. Governments should also support the strategic development of higher education systems in achieving innovative learning and teaching, fostering a structured dialogue between teachers, students, staff and stakeholders. In doing so, the challenges and opportunities for open and digital learning need to be taken into account and the results of educational research incorporated.

We wish to develop further the National Qualifications Frameworks as tools to improve transparency and ask the BFUG to update the criteria for self-certification; so that self-certification reports include a stronger element of peer review. The Network should continue its work in the coming work period, giving due attention to the possible inclusion of Short Cycle Higher Education in the QF-EHEA, and in general contributing to the further development for the QF-EHEA.

We express appreciation for the efforts to strengthen Global Policy Dialogue, and to organize, in conjunction with this meeting, a first Global Policy Forum, which builds on the insights and commitments already developed in the previous five Bologna Policy Fora. We salute the countries, organizations, including those of the world regions that, sharing our vision and ethical principles on education, commit with us to encouraging our higher education systems deploy their resources of knowledge and initiative to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

We wish to explore possibilities of putting our respective systems into closer dialogue, bearing in mind the primary interest of our students, by implementing transparent qualifications frameworks, enhancement oriented quality assurance norms and practices, in order to assure smooth and fair mobility and recognition. We recognize and appreciate the efforts of many countries and even individual higher education institutions around the world to implement the 'Bologna Process' in their own context, and we mandate the future BFUG through the Coordination Group on Global

Policy Dialogue to specify the procedures and criteria for recognizing the status of 'Bologna Global Dialogue Partner' to those that request it.

[More details will be added based on the input received from the groups which for now is only preliminary and in some cases absent.]

Priorities of the EHEA beyond 2020²

Our overarching commitment for the present decade is to contribute to securing a sustainable future through meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. We call on all components of the EHEA, and more generally of Higher Education worldwide, to bring their remarkable research and educational capacities to bear on this fundamental global objective and will support their efforts to do so.

In order to build the future of the EHEA, we must strengthen our efforts to promote quality higher education, democracy and societal advancement through shared fundamental values. We therefore reaffirm our commitment to promoting and protecting our common fundamental values - academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education. We ask BFUG to pursue the work of developing a monitoring framework for fundamental values in higher education.

The next decade of the EHEA should focus, inter-alia, on cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional and cross-border cooperation; inclusive and innovative approaches to learning and teaching; transnational cooperation in higher education; closer links between higher education, research and innovation; stronger synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA); promoting mutual learning and joint initiatives to ensure social inclusion and develop the wider role of education; focusing greater attention on the social dimension of higher education.

The decade we are entering will bring disruptive and rapid change. Swifter up-dating of knowledge, skills and competences, as well as greater emphasis on creativity and innovation, active learning and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership and social influence, reasoning and problem solving will be needed. Technological design, programming and system analysis and evaluation, will be at the forefront, but not to the exclusion of the social and human sciences, which must continue to play their vital role in giving depth and meaning to our lives, and a moral compass to our societies, thus allowing us to make best use of increasingly performant technologies.

Higher education institutions will be called upon to shift from their current, nearly exclusive, emphasis on complete degree programmes to provide more flexible learning paths, and more numerous options for many smaller units of learning which people will want and need in order to update their professional, cultural and transversal competences at various stages in their lives. They will increasingly be called upon to combine different modes of delivery and a variety of learning paths.

² The next decade of the EHEA should focus, inter-alia, on cross-disciplinary and cross-border cooperation; inclusive and innovative approaches to learning and teaching; transnational cooperation in higher education, research and innovation, through synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA); securing a sustainable future through meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); promoting mutual learning and joint initiatives, such as social inclusion and the wider role of education; strengthening the social dimension of higher education. (http://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_meeting_Bucharest/BFUG_RO_MK_65_9_7_Roadmap.pdf).

Mobility continues to be the most powerful tool for connecting our systems and fostering the development of intercultural competences and broader knowledge and understanding of our world. We support all measures which encourage the further development and expansion of quality mobility, including virtual and blended, and the use and development of transparency tools.

Along with quality, mobility and transparency, we see flexibility and openness of learning paths (all part of the original inspiration for the Bologna process) as even more important in the future than in the past. We consider all these features necessary for true 'student-centered learning' to take place, as students/learners with diverse professional, cultural and educational backgrounds must have the possibility and the tools to seek out and avail themselves of the educational opportunities most useful for them, at any time of life.

We foresee that 'Micro-credentials' will become a common feature of the learning - teaching - assessment offer. We must ensure that such forms of learning are properly described and included in learners' records. Secure digital credentials will be necessary to ensure appropriate recognition of the many 'pieces' of learning that citizens may accumulate in the course of their professional and personal lives.

We believe that the present Bologna tools will continue to be useful, and the implementation of the Key Commitments still essential: the cycles, ECTS, the transparency tools, the agreed principles for QA and for recognition, will in fact be more needed than ever before. They can permit flexibility of learning paths, the accumulation of mini/micro-credentials and the secure portability of records. They can make it possible to certify and quality assure the volume and level of various kinds of learning which will be required in the future.

In order to achieve this, some new tools may need to be developed or existing ones adapted or perfected. To reach the ambitious goal of smooth automatic recognition of qualifications within the EHEA, including appropriate recognition of prior learning, work-based learning, formal, informal and non-formal learning, secure systems of digital certification and communication must be extended and enhanced, further developing such tools as the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and common assessment criteria and reports.

The Ministers mandate the BFUG to consider and if necessary adapt and integrate the existing transparency tools.

Building a European Higher Education Community by 2030

We recognize the need of a new societal alliance, where universities continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring scientific, social, economic and cultural innovation, in building a new, fairer and more equitable world, where education, research and the third mission are connected and empowered. In this perspective we welcome all initiatives aimed to create innovative synergies and alliances among universities, alliances conceived as flexible and adaptive environments, in order to promote joint research and innovative multilateral teaching approaches, developing and making available appropriate tools to cope with the challenges ahead. We see the European Universities' alliances as pointing to one novel way of achieving closer cohesion and cooperation among HEIs, which should not exclude others.

In this perspective, all features of the EHEA and its current and forward looking initiatives will be essential, and the three Key Commitments already identified will continue to be important as because they will form the basic agreed rules, which allow the EHEA system to function smoothly.

Beyond the present *Key and Core Commitments* and the many specific dimensions already being developed or to be developed, we hold it essential to involve the entire higher education community and society at large more effectively in the process of transformation that we envision as imminent and necessary for advancing human and societal health and well-being. Higher education institutions should consider more seriously their societal role, searching for and providing solutions to the challenges our societies face today, ranging from climate change, to public health issues and the rise of non-rationalism in the political debate. Higher education institutions must look ahead to prepare the future generations and more generally give guidance to society, deal creatively and proactively with new challenges, and contribute to ensuring a more cohesive and inclusive society, based on democracy and the rule of law.

The 2020-2030 decade should see both the completion, testing and perfecting of members' compliance with the agreed commitments, so that our higher education systems can function smoothly, and the generation of more widely spread cultural acceptance and understanding of their background, usefulness and implications among the 'stakeholders': that is, the broader community of universities -- students, academics, administrators – employers, families and society at large.

In order to communicate more broadly and to motivate all stakeholders to participate in the necessary common effort, we commit to the goal of building, by 2030, a “European Higher Education Community” within the EHEA.

We commit to this goal to underline the aspects of including, belonging, sharing, contributing, communicating and collaborating, as well as to underline the societal role of higher education, which will be essential for the future of the EHEA.

[More elements will be added when the results of the consultations will be available.]

Governance

[Will depend on the consultation results and the discussions thereof].

Conclusions

The rapid changes we foresee in society, the need for new, more sustainable and more equitable approaches to the economy, the challenge of pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals, all point to the growing need for the EHEA and the European higher education world to take up its responsibilities resolutely, in a spirit of trust, respect and collaboration.

The Ministers underline the need to involve more closely all higher education stakeholders as well as society at large, both of which need to participate in this major effort.

The Ministers call on the BFUG to address with vigor the single priorities mandated for the future decade, and the overall goal of creating a smoothly functioning, forward-looking, inclusive and excellent European Higher Education Community by 2030.

The Ministers gratefully accept the offer by [country] to host the next Ministerial Conference of the EHEA and the Bologna Global Policy Forum in [city] on [date]

Appendices

The Principles and Guidelines on Social Dimension of Higher Education
[...]

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