

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP

Online, June 25, 2020

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA 2018 - 20

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe is a consultative member of the BFUG and Board. It has been an active contributor to the Bologna Process since the outset, including as Chair or Co-Chair of Working Groups on Structural Reforms (2012 – 15) and Qualifications Frameworks (2007 – 09 and 2009 – 12) and a member of several other working or advisory groups. With UNESCO, the Council of Europe is the co-depository of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the only legally binding text of the EHEA, which has been ratified by all EHEA member States except Greece as well as by several non-EHEA countries.

FRAMEWORK

The Council of Europe's [Education program](#) is overseen by the [Steering Committee on Educational Policy and Practice](#) (CDPPE), made up of the representatives of all 50 States Party to the European Cultural Convention, including all 48 EHEA members.

At the CDPPE plenary session on March 19 – 21, 2019, Maria Fassari (Greece) was elected Chair and Maija Innola (Finland) - a member of the BFUG – Vice Chair. The CDPPE meets twice a year, normally in March and October. The 2020 spring plenary session, scheduled to be for March 18 – 20, had to be canceled because of the COVID pandemic. Instead, an [extraordinary online session](#) of the CDPPE was organized on April 24 to enable delegations to exchange experience on the challenges of the COVID pandemic. A second extraordinary online session will be held on June 11 – 12, as two longish morning sessions, to consider a CDPPE COVID response. The next ordinary CDPPE session will be held on September 30 - October 2. Preparations are being made for both an online and a face to face session with the decision on the format to be made as late as possible. The current Bureau was prolonged until the fall plenary. A sub-group on higher education advises the CDPPE and its Bureau, met online on April 28.

The Education Department is part of the Directorate of Democratic Participation, encompassing Education, Culture and Youth, with Matjaž Gruden as Director.

The Head of the Education Department is Sjur Bergan. The Education Policy Division is headed by Michael Remmert, the Division for [Cooperation and Capacity Building](#) by Sarah Keating and the [European Centre for Modern Languages](#), located in Graz, by Sarah Breslin. Stefania Kruger (Education Policy Division) is Secretary to the CDPPE.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Education program¹ aims to strengthen the contribution of Education to the Council of Europe's overarching goals of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. In the 2020 – 21 program, adopted by the Committee of Ministers at the end of November 2019, all education projects are incorporated into the overall program on Education for Democracy.

[Higher education](#) is a policy area within the program as well as a part of several transversal projects, in particular:

¹ For an overview, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education>.

- [Competences for Democratic Culture](#)
- [Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity in Education \(ETINED\)](#)
- [Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education](#)

The specific higher education program covers:

- [The democratic mission of higher education](#)
- [Qualifications, including recognition](#)
- [The European Higher Education Area](#).

Global Forum on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy

Since the late 1990s, the Council of Europe has cooperated with the [International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy](#) on furthering the [democratic mission](#) of higher education. The [Organization of American States](#) and [the International Association of Universities](#) have now also joined this cooperation, which is focused around Global Fora every two – three years as well as a series of publications.

The 2019 Global Forum was held in Strasbourg on June 20 – 21 and focused on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the future of democracy. The [Magna Charta Observatory](#) was a co-organizer of this year's Forum. The keynote address was delivered by Professor Liviu Matei, Provost of the Central European University. A series of regional overviews covered Europe, North America, Latin America, East Asia, and Oceania, while another session focused on the role of public authorities. This session included presentations by Ligia Deca, Education Adviser to the President of Romania (and a former Head of the Bologna Secretariat as well as a former President of ESU), as well as Stefania Giannini, the Assistant Director-General for Education of UENSCO and a former Italian Minister of Education. A panel discussion featured representatives of ESU and Education International as well as the President of the Magna Charta Observatory, a representative of the Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community of Belgium, and a US university president, while EURASHE presented a view from professional higher education in a session that also include the Intranational Association of Universities, the EuroMed Network, and a US university president.

The Global Forum will provide valuable input to the Rome Ministerial Conference, both through the Declaration it adopted (included in the appendix) and through the book that is now close to publication.

The next Global Forum will be held in May/June 2021, subject to the development of the COVID pandemic, and will focus on the link between democracy, the democratic mission of higher education, and sustainable development. It will address the implications of the COVID pandemic in this context. As underlined in a [University World News article](#) by the Council of

Europe and several other partners in this cooperation, it is important higher education help shape the post-COVID-19 world.

The Council of Europe is also working on the local mission of higher education. Following three invitational conferences, the last of which was held in Strasbourg on June 18 – 19, 2019, a small group has now been established to put forward proposals for an organized European cooperation on this topic. The group is chaired by Maija Innola and held its first meeting online on March 20.

Recognition of qualifications

With UNESCO, the Council of Europe is co-depository of the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#). It serves as co-secretariat to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee as well as to the [ENIC Network](#), which cooperates closely with the NARIC Network of the European Commission. Jean-Philippe Restoueix is co-secretary to both bodies.

The 2019 annual ENIC/NARIC meeting was held in Köln on June 16 – 18, while the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee met at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on June 28, 2019. The ENIC and NARIC Networks were scheduled to meet in Lisbon in early June 2020, but this meeting has now been rescheduled to June 2021. In the meantime, a shorter ENIC/NARIC meeting will be held online on June 15 and supplemented by a series of webinars during the last half of 2020. The next ordinary meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee will be held in 2022.

The [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees](#) aims to provide a methodology for assessing refugees' qualifications even when they cannot be fully documented as well as for describing the assessment in such a way that it can be accepted across borders. Of the 543 refugees whose qualification had been assessed at the time of writing, 454 obtained the EQPR. Of these, 163 were interviewed online. In other words, the success rate is about 83 per cent, and this rate has been stable in the current phase of the project. The Council of Europe had planned to present the EQPR at the Rome Global Summit, in cooperation with its project partners.

As part of the [Council of Europe's response](#) to the COVID pandemic, and in cooperation with the UNHCR, the potential use of the EQPR to [identify refugees with health-related qualifications](#) is now carried out in France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Most health-related professions are regulated and therefore require a professional license. The [EQPR cannot replace this professional license but may help identify candidates for licensing procedures as well as qualified persons who may help meet the challenges of the COVID crisis](#) under the supervision of duly licensed health professionals.

Qualifications frameworks

The Council of Europe coordinates the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks, established to exchange experience in the development and self-certification of national qualifications frameworks within and against the Overarching Framework of

Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) as well as to ensure coherence between the QF-EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

The Network met in Strasbourg on September 5, 2019, end-on with a meeting of the QF per group. A [report](#) was submitted to the Board for its meeting in Istanbul on September 24. The next meeting of the Network was to be held in Strasbourg on April 27 but had to be postponed because of the COVID pandemic. The Council of Europe is now making arrangements to hold this meeting in September, most likely on September 11 and most likely online.

In addition to providing a platform for regular updates and exchange of experience, it is proposed that the Network focus on short cycle qualifications and above all on developing the format and methodology for self-certification further, with a view to include a stronger element of peer review in these. Unlike the peer group on qualifications frameworks under the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group, the Network includes policy development among its tasks.

The final report of the Network for the work period 2018 – 2020 is submitted separately to the BFUG meeting on June 25.

Capacity building and advice to new members

The Council of Europe has traditionally played an important role in advising and assisting newer and prospective members of the EHEA. In addition to individual requests for advice, which tend to focus on structural reforms, several [capacity building](#) projects may be of interest to higher education, possibly in particular the [regional joint programs with the EU](#).

The Council of Europe was a member of the Belarus Roadmap Advisory Group in the 2015 – 18 work program and is now a member of the *ad hoc* group established to provide advice to the BFUG on San Marino's accession to the EHEA.

Bologna Process Researchers' Conference

The Bologna Process Researchers' Conferences have been organized by Romania in the run-up to every Ministerial conference since the one in 2012. The purpose is to provide a research perspective of the development of the EHEA. The Council of Europe has contributed to every conference except the first one, as co-coordinator of the conference strand on the future development of the EHEA. The [most recent conference](#) was held on January 29 – 31, 2020, again with the Council of Europe as co-coordinator of the strand on "The future of the EHEA – principles, challenges and ways forward". The publication on the basis of the conference will be presented to the 2020 Ministerial conference.

Implications of the COVID pandemic

The implications of the COVID pandemic are severe for all areas of education. Higher education faces particular challenges because much of the education is provided in larger groups, including

in auditoriums, because it relies heavily on larger structures like libraries and laboratories, and because of its high degree of internationalization. Many institutions have announced that they will not be able to resume classes fully during the 2020 - 21 academic year, and several countries have announced the suspension of student and staff exchange.

The CDPPE has just appointed a small task force, including representatives of higher education, to develop the CDPPE COVID response. This will likely consist of a political declaration as well as proposals for adaptations and reorientation of the Council of Europe education program. This will be a main issue at the CDPPE plenary session on September 30 – October 2, 2020.

Work has also just been launched on a publication on the higher education response to the COVID pandemic in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series, in cooperation with other partner in the project on the democratic mission of higher education. The working title is *The Higher Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Responsibility for a Sustainable Future*.

Publications

The [Council of Europe Higher Education Series](#) comprises books on topical higher education issues, in particular the democratic mission of higher education and recognition and qualifications. 23 volumes have been published since late 2004; the latest are on [*Higher Education for Diversity, Social Inclusion and Community. A Democratic Imperative*](#) and [*Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*](#) (with UNESCO). Volume 24, on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy, will be published in time for the 2020 Ministerial conference.

The three publications on the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture may also be of interest to higher education policy makers and practitioners. Volume 1 covers [context, concepts, and the model](#), Volume 2 [descriptors](#), and Volume 3 [Guidance for implementation](#).

The [publications of the ETINED Platform](#) (Ethics, Transparency and integrity) may likewise be of interest. So far, these cover ethical principles, ethical behavior of all actors in education, codes of conduct for teachers in Europe; a background study, and a study on policies for academic integrity in South East Europe in addition to a publication based on the launching conference of the ETINED Platform. On October 16, the Committee of Ministers adopted a [Recommendation to member States on fostering a culture of ethics in the teaching profession](#).

APPENDIX

DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE GLOBAL FORUM ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM, INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The Global Forum on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy was held at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg on 20 – 21 June 2019 and co-organized by the Council of Europe; the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy; the Organization of American States; the Magna Charta Observatory; and the International Association of Universities.

Participants in the Global Forum adopt the following

DECLARATION

1. Education, including higher education, is responsible for advancing and disseminating knowledge and developing ethical and able citizens. It therefore plays an essential role in modern democratic societies. Education is key to developing, maintaining, and sustaining a culture of democracy without which democratic laws, institutions, and elections cannot function in practice: education furthers and supports a set of attitudes and behaviours that seeks resolution of conflicts through dialogue; that accepts that while majorities decide, minorities have certain inalienable rights; and that sees diversities of background and opinion as a strength rather than as a threat. Education at all levels is therefore critical in helping develop the values, ethic, and ways of thinking on which democratic societies are based and which strengthen opposition and resilience to terrorism and violent extremism.
2. Higher education can only fulfil its mission if faculty, staff and students enjoy academic freedom and institutions are autonomous; principles laid out in the Magna Charta Universitatum as well as the UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are essential to furthering the quality of learning, teaching, and research, including include artistic creative practice – quality understood as observing and developing the standards of academic disciplines and also quality as the contribution of higher education to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Higher education must demonstrate openness, transparency, responsiveness and accountability as well as the will and ability to work with and contribute to the communities in which colleges and universities reside.
3. The future of democracy is at risk in the absence of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, just as it is when the press, media or civil society organizations are weakened and compromised. Increasingly, these freedoms and institutions are threatened and undermined. The community of faculty, staff and students as well as higher education

leaders must combine autonomy and accountability, freedom of research and teaching, and societal responsibility.

4. Faculty, staff, and students, higher education leaders, and public authorities can and should support academic freedom and institutional autonomy and contribute to its implementation. Equally, each can harm, limit and undermine these fundamental democratic values, as we see in too many instances in too many parts of the world. Countries that have counted among the established democracies are not immune to the temptations of silencing critical voices in academia: the Central European University – which provided the keynote address at our Global Forum – is but one example.
5. While academic freedom may be understood as the freedom of expression aligned with the standards of knowledge and research, members of the academic community have a double duty: to challenge received knowledge and understanding through high quality research, teaching, and enquiry, and to use their academic freedom to further the common purposes and improvement of our societies.
6. Campuses must be fora of vigorous debate and honest pursuit of truth, guided by the desire to help all human beings. Any limits on freedom of expression must be based on protection of the specific rights of others (e.g., to protect against discrimination or defamation) rather than on expediency or to advance a single political ideology.
7. Institutional autonomy is often understood through the prism of the legal relationship between higher education institutions and public authorities. Institutions cannot be autonomous unless public authorities allow them to be so, but legal provision alone can guarantee neither the pursuit of knowledge nor democracy, since both depend upon open democratic values, attitudes and behaviours. Any limitations on institutional autonomy must be based on essential educational or legal needs (such as those reflected in accreditation requirements or non-discrimination laws), not on political grounds.
8. Participants recognize that while academic freedom and institutional autonomy are often considered together, one does not necessarily guarantee the other. A culture that values and promotes academic freedom should be encouraged across higher education institutions regardless of their level of institutional autonomy.
9. Significant violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy threaten democracy. Sadly, their frequency is on the rise. Public authorities and the academic community alike must be vigilant in addressing and challenging such violations, and the responsibility for doing so does not stop at institutional or national borders. An attack on the freedom of one member of the academic community or the autonomy of one institution is an attack on the fundamental values of our democracies, regardless of where it takes place.
10. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are also threatened when financial support from individuals, private corporations, or institutional donors predominantly determines the focus of research and teaching and diminishes the public and democratic purposes of

higher education. In general, public funding is fundamental, but financial support from multiple sources and financing not narrowly earmarked can strengthen academic freedom and institutional autonomy without diminishing the crucial societal role of higher education.

11. Administrative regulations, public and private indifference, considerations of immediate return on investment, a limited view of utility, and seeing higher education only through the lens of a narrow economic agenda also threaten academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Financial regulations and arrangements should be used to further rather than to limit institutional autonomy. More broadly, academic freedom and institutional autonomy are threatened by the absence of a vision that connects the purposes of higher education to democratic purpose.

The participants in the Global Forum therefore call on

Members of the academic community and their organizations

- to orient their research, learning, and teaching toward developing knowledge and understanding based on facts and science and interpreting these in a spirit of open mindedness and respect for differences of views, backgrounds, and traditions;
- to provide broader society with factually based knowledge and to base their own participation in public debate on the same standards of truthfulness, open mindedness and respect that should be at the base of their academic work;
- to refrain from any actions that could contribute to – or legitimize – the spread of false or misleading information, including spurious claims of “fake news” and “alternative facts”, or willful distortion of the results of their own research or that of others.

Higher education institutions and their leaders

- to raise awareness among members of the academic community of the importance of academic freedom and institutional autonomy as well as the crucial role of higher education to democracy;
- to commit to maintaining, developing, and sustaining the public purpose and social responsibility of higher education;

- to explore the role and meaning of academic freedom and institutional autonomy within their respective institutions and systems, and the steps needed to protect these in an increasingly polarized and divided public sphere;
- to commit to – or maintain their commitment to, as the case may be – the *Magna Charta Universitatum*.

Higher education leaders and their organizations as well as public authorities at all levels

- to create and maintain the conditions for the academic community to enjoy freedom of research, learning, and teaching as well as the freedom to engage in public debate based on their academic work;
- to create and maintain an atmosphere of vigorous and respectful debate within their institutions and higher education systems;
- to ensure faculty, staff and students the freedom to teach, learn and research without the fear of disciplinary action, dismissal or any other form of retribution.
- to give due regard to academic freedom and institutional autonomy in setting higher education priorities, developing policies, and assessing funding options.
- to provide sufficiently secure employment conditions for faculty/academic staff to exercise academic freedom.

Public authorities

- to set the framework for academic freedom and institutional autonomy and continuously monitor the implementation of those fundamental rights, while encouraging the adoption of sustainable long-term strategies for higher education;
- to take due account of the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in developing regulations and policies in other areas of public responsibility;
- to balance the need for general rules and regulations ensuring the protection of individuals and guaranteeing sound public administration with respect for the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy;
- to provide strong public funding as a basic requirement for autonomy and academic freedom.



The Council of Europe, the Organization of American States, and other international institutions and organizations

- to make academic freedom and institutional autonomy key elements of their work to further democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, through normative standards as well as policy;
- to address violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy within their member States at a political level as well as through their Education programmes and projects.

The Ministers of the European Higher Education Area, who will meet in Rome in June 2020

- to recommit to upholding academic freedom and institutional autonomy as part of the foundation on which the European Higher Education Area is built;
- to include the gathering of information on the respect for academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the Bologna Process Implementation Reports and to provide and facilitate the gathering of such information within their own countries and systems;
- to address violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy at political level within the European Higher Education Area, in view of their collective political responsibility for the EHEA.

The Council of Europe, the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, the Organization of American States, and other partners in our cooperation on the democratic mission of higher education

- to continue their work to strengthen the role of higher education in developing, maintaining, and sustaining democratic societies;
- to continue to highlight the importance of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in furthering higher education's democratic mission as well as to develop policy proposals and engage in public advocacy to more fully achieve that mission.