



## Working Group on Fundamental Values

First Meeting, Hosted by Malta, Online\*

Friday, June 18, 2021

10.00-15.30 (Brussels time)

### Minutes

#### List of Participants

1	Austria	Liviu	Matei
2	Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
3	Croatia	Leonardo	Marušić
4	EI - ETUCE	Rob	Copeland
5	ENQA	Anna	Gover
6	ESU - European Students' Union	Matteo	Vespa
7	EUA - European University Association	Monika	Steinel
8	European Commission	Kinga	Szuly
9	Eurydice	David	Crosier
10	Finland	Maija	Innola
11	France	Carle	Bonafous-Murat
12	Germany (Co-chair)	Frank	Petrikowski
13	Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
14	Iceland	Una	Strand Viðarsdóttir
15	Italy	Luca	Lantero
16	Malta (Co-chair)	Rose Anne	Cuschieri
17	Norway (Co-chair)	Tone Flood	Strøm
18	Poland	Ewa Agnieszka	Lekka-Kowalik
19	Romania (Co-chair)	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
20	Sweden	Robin	Moberg
21	Switzerland	Aurélia	Robert-Tissot
22	Turkey	Aslı	GÜNAY
23	United Kingdom (Scotland)	Michael	Watney
24	EACEA	Susanna	Zellini
25	BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Enida	Bezhani
26	BFUG Secretariat	Irma	Sheqi
27	BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari



Kazakhstan, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Russia and United Kingdom (EWNI) did not participate in the meeting.

**\*Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online.

## **Welcome and introduction to the meeting by the Co-chairs**

The Co-chairs, Rose Ann Cuschieri, Tone Flood Strøm, Frank Petrikowski and Mihai Cezar Hâj welcomed all the members of the WG and emphasized its importance in developing a comprehensive framework to further the monitoring and implementation of the fundamental values of the EHEA in the HE systems of its members.

### **1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without any changes.

For more detailed information, please see *WG\_Fundamental Values\_PT\_AD\_1\_Draft Agenda*.

### **2. Tour de Table**

All members of the WG on FV introduced themselves and informed on the positions they held within the institutions/organizations they represented.

### **3. Presentation of the work and conclusions of the former Task Force on Fundamental Values**

Mrs. Strøm introduced the work and conclusions of the former Task Force (TF) on FV, established by the BFUG at the Vienna meeting (2018), as a sub-group, under the auspices of WG 1 on Monitoring. The three specific tasks agreed for the TF were:

- To consider how fundamental values can be clearly understood in the HE systems across the EHEA;
- To propose a methodology that recognizes the limits of self-reporting and goes beyond this approach for future reporting to the Ministerial Conferences on the issues defined as fundamental values in the Paris Communiqué;
- To recommend indicators of fundamental values, as well as the evidence required to assess them and the source for such evidence.

The TF had focused on the values outlined in the Paris Communiqué - academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in HE governance and public responsibility for and of HE.



Recognizing that all the values are of equal and of crucial importance, the main focus of this TF was, however, set on academic freedom and how to establish a common understanding of academic freedom, as it was seen as the area most lacking in reporting. The Task Force considered it necessary and important to outline a clear and common understanding of academic freedom for the EHEA, in order to have an agreed reference point for understanding, implementing, protecting and promoting academic freedom.

A draft report, along with a clear definition of academic freedom was discussed and in the end adopted by the BFUG. At the Ministerial Conference in Rome in November 2020, the Communiqué was adopted by the ministers, including the statement on academic freedom. BFUG agreed that following the Ministerial Conference in Rome, the work on values should be pursued by a separate WG on Fundamental Values and on the 76th meeting of the BFUG, the ToRs for the WG on Fundamental Values were approved.

Following the presentation, it was proposed and agreed that for the work period 2021-2024:

- The work of the WG should focus on the remaining fundamental values, defined in the Paris and Rome Communiqués, not covered to a great extent so far;
- The WG should look at how to develop mechanisms to protect and promote all the fundamental values of the EHEA. The development of a monitoring framework should include both *de jure* and *de facto* indicators of the fundamental values in line with the Rome Communiqué;
- One should apply the same kind of approach to the exploration of the remaining values as the Task Force had done for academic freedom, i.e. to establish a common understanding of those values. The group should invite experts and researchers working in the field to contribute to this work, most likely through hearing sessions.

For more detailed information, please see *(presentation) and the Task\_Force\_for\_Future\_Monitoring\_of\_Values\_Final\_Report*.

#### **4. Presentation of past and future work on indicators on fundamental values, by the WG on Monitoring**

Mr. Crosier drew attention to the section of the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report (<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/european-higher-education-area-2018-bologna-process-implementation-report>) on the values and governance in relation to academic freedom, stating that focus was put at that time only on the *de jure* indicators. The collection of data and the methodology used were based solely on information and evidence from the countries' self-reporting. This represented a serious limitation, as no information could be gathered on how values were experienced in reality, including cases of serious violation, and in cases where public authorities were responsible for violations, there was no possibility of gathering unbiased information. Therefore, it was agreed to assemble a separate group within the Bologna Process in order to thoroughly establish a framework that promotes and protects values.



### The current state of play

It was noted that the work of the TF (now WG) on the *de jure* aspects should continue and information shall be collected from governments and/or the BFUG members directly. Furthermore, the *de facto* aspect should be taken into consideration with regard to academic freedom.

Two main options were identified for the development of the *de facto* indicators of academic freedom for future reporting:

- The *de facto* indicators could be developed from scratch and linked to the definitions and concepts included in the Rome Communiqué;
- Academic Freedom Index (AFi) could be used.

While the first option poses constraints (i.e., difficulty in obtaining data), the AFi was launched only the year before. The main aspects of this tool were presented by Ms. Zellini. It uses publicly available data that is very robustly collected and includes a range of indicators. This is the first assessment instrument that captures the *de facto* realization of academic freedom at a global scale in a very comprehensive way. In comparison to previous assessments of academic freedom, this AFi provides for the first time a global dataset with assessments of five dimensions of academic freedom for 175 countries and territories that date back to 1900. The AFi is based on expert assessments and provides a comprehensive overview not only in a geographical context, but also in a historical context.

The AFi consists of five indicators: freedom to research and teach, freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy, compass integrity and freedom of cultural expression. There are, however, two main aspects mentioned in the EHEA Statement on academic freedom that are not covered in the AFi:

1. Freedom of learning - from a student's perspective, this aspect is currently not elaborated in the AFi. Thus, it should be addressed and potential solutions should be suggested;
2. Staff conditions - a topic which is also referenced in the Rome Communiqué. It was emphasized that this is a very crucial aspect of the UNESCO 97 Recommendation, adding that secure employment conditions for the academic staff should not be undermined.

It was suggested that the WG should consider the potential development of indicators in these two areas, independently or in cooperation with the AFi researchers. Should the WG, decide to collaborate with specialized researchers, there could be room for discussion on potential areas that need to be further examined.



## 5. Initial discussion on the tasks of the WG

### 1.1. How to proceed with the development of the *de jure* and *de facto* indicators on academic freedom

The 2024 implementation report ought to include both *de jure* and *de facto* indicators of academic freedom that are in line with the Rome Communiqué. The AFi data is the best tool to specify the *de facto* indicators, despite some limitations mentioned before. It was suggested that one option would be for the WG to work with the AFi researchers, as well as other interested researchers, to develop indicators.

### 1.2. The task of defining the values: institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in HE governance and public responsibility for and of HE

A number of organizations and projects have constructed indicators related to institutional autonomy. The AFi has developed a single indicator on institutional autonomy, which focuses on certain aspects of autonomy. In its Autonomy Scorecard first launched in 2011, EUA has broken down institutional autonomy into four different thematic areas: organizational, financial, staff and academic autonomy. Other new, updated indicators have since been developed by the EUA.

Other values such as participation of students and staff in HE governance and public responsibility should be equally addressed. However, it was noted that developing and assessing data on the public responsibility for higher education will also prove challenging in terms of operationalization, and some initial work is needed to develop a shared conceptual understanding of what should be assessed.

Following the Rome Communiqué, a method for monitoring data collection of the indicators ought to be developed. It was felt by some members that the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) and the AFi are not ideal in their current state, as they are not EHEA instruments developed in response to the EHEA understanding of academic freedom. It was also pointed out that there may be difficulties in adapting this instrument to the EHEA needs. Thus, some members would ideally favor the development of a new tool that focuses on the collection of data following up the EHEA statement on academic freedom. Other WG members felt that using the AFi was the most promising solution, given both the limited time available for developing a monitoring tool, as well as pondering the question whether developing a separate tool from scratch would result in something very different from the ones already in existence. And while the EHEA common understanding of academic freedom may go further than the current version of the AFi, it may be better to maintain a global conception of fundamental values, rather than to highlight European differences.

There was agreement that there is a need to make sure that the monitoring is based on independent sources, as this is a particularly politically-sensitive issue. Consequently, there is a need for an independent actor, preferably with specialized researchers and experts, to look into the data, despite the mentioning of previous concerns about the index.



There was agreement that the focus and reference point of the WG's work ought to be the statement on and the definition of academic freedom adopted by the EHEA ministers. The fact that the Afi is a global index was mentioned and that this would necessarily also require adaptations (such as the development of additional indicators) if it were to be used for the EHEA. However, the Afi and the methodology used to collect data by the GPPI was seen by the group as a good starting point.

It was observed that there are differences and challenges related to, amongst other things, definitions, but it would be promising to work with the researchers behind the Afi, to see if the indicators can be adapted or moderated to fill the gaps between the EHEA definition and the Afi. To achieve collection of data with high validity and credibility, it was recommended by some WG members to make use of external organizations (i.e., Council of Europe) that can represent and collect data in an independent manner and look at indicators that have not been yet provided by the Afi. Furthermore, the concept of 'freedom of cultural expression,' which is used in the Afi, lacks clarity and is a complex issue to measure and analyze. In order to concentrate on the definition provided in the Rome Communiqué, the notion of 'freedom of expression' was suggested to be more in line with the EHEA statement.

The EUA scoreboard on institutional autonomy was referred to as an important source for gathering data on institutional autonomy, as it takes a more thorough, sophisticated and nuanced view on institutional autonomy than the Afi indicator.

Obtaining citizens' viewpoints on academic freedom was discussed, with the caveat that rather than working with the citizens, the WG should focus on the academic assessments of academic freedom. While academic freedom needs to be clearly situated in a societal debate, in terms of assessing its state, the academic community is most adequately qualified to do this.

There was majority agreement that gathering data, developing a new framework and a set of tools and indicators from 'scratch' would be very complex and unfeasible for this group. Resources and capacity are also in shortage to start work from the beginning. The definition of academic freedom has already been established and adopted by the EHEA ministers. Therefore, it was recommended to use the Afi as a starting point, working with the researchers on the Afi, to see if some of the present indicators can be adapted to fit the WG's needs, as well as to see whether they can gather additional data to develop indicators that are suitable for the additional tasks of this WG.

It was concluded that the Afi presents many challenges when seen from the perspective of the work of the EHEA. A pragmatic approach should be adopted by making use of the existing resources. It will be beneficial to cooperate initially with the Afi researchers, as well as take into account the data on institutional autonomy provided by the EUA. To achieve long-term results, the WG should identify existing gaps and areas of improvement. Currently, the work will focus on existing definitions and indicators. Furthermore, the WG will work closely with researchers to find ways and test how to adopt the indicators.



## **6. Presentation of the approved Terms of Reference**

An overview of the ToRs for the Fundamental Values group was provided, indicating that the document was approved in the BFUG meeting, hosted by Portugal on the 15th and 16th of April.

## **7. Working methods of the WG**

### 7.1. Organization of "hearings" on the different subjects and involvement of experts

The importance of inviting scholars and researchers working in the field to contribute to the work of the WG was underlined. It was emphasized that there is a need to talk to experts on all the values mentioned in the Rome Communiqué to assist with developing indicators. In such case, they need to be briefed beforehand or presented with a report that contains all the necessary information. As per the institutional autonomy, it was suggested to work with the EUA and experts that have developed more in-depth indicators.

The WG ought to cooperate with a broad range of professionals, who work on issues that relate to all the fundamental values – either through specific discussions on each value or through a broader discussion that includes all values. There is also a need to discuss with experts/organizations that can provide data or surveys. It was suggested to carry out a mapping of the different surveys and/or data collection in existence, covering the fundamental values, as this would prove helpful in obtaining data. EUA is planning their new Trends report and the possibility, to be discussed internally by EUA, to integrate a few questions on values from an institutional perspective was mentioned.

It was mentioned that a meeting with experts has to be prepared both in terms of who to invite and also on the kind of input is asked for from them. It was suggested to develop a short briefing paper, in order to prepare for such a meeting.

### 7.2. Next meeting

The Co-chairs will identify potential dates for the next meeting and the Secretariat will notify the WG' members accordingly.

## **8. AOB**

No other business was brought forward and the first Fundamental Values meeting was closed with thanks to the Co-chairs and the BFUG Secretariat.