

Advisory Group 1: EHEA International cooperation

Nizhny Novgorod (Russia), 14 October 2016

Draft minutes

List of participants

AUF / Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie	Erol KÛLAHCI
BELGIUM VL	Noel VERCRUYSSSE
BFUG SECRETARIAT, Head	Françoise PROFIT
BFUG SECRETARIAT	Mariana SAAD
CYPRUS	Stelios CHRISTOPHIDES
EAIE / European Association For International Education	Markus LAITINEN
ESU-UK	Beth BUTTON
EU COMMISSION	Marlène BARTES
FRANCE / Ministry of education, higher education and research / BFUG Vice Chair / co-chair	Patricia POL
GERMANY	Katrin FOHMANN
LICHTENSTEIN	Daniel MEISCHER
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	Alexander GRUDZINSKIY
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	Boris ZHELEZOV
UNESCO	Peter WELLS
UNITED KINGDOM co-chair	Ella RITCHIE

The representatives from Estonia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Romania, Spain, Union for the Mediterranean, EUA, EOCD, ACA, EI/ETEUCE, ENQA were unable to attend

1. Welcome and Introduction to the meeting

Welcome by the representatives of Lobachevsky University and NN region (the hosts?)

Evgeny Chuprunov, Rector of the University, welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of the Bologna process for the University's international strategy. Lobachevsky University belongs to a group of top universities in Russia.

Irina Zvereva, representative of the Ministry of Education of the Nizhny Novgorod region, stressed that the University joined the Bologna process in 2003 and that since then much has been done to integrate Russia in the European education system.

Welcome by the co-chairs

The co-chairs of Advisory Group 1 thanked the Russian hosts for their warm welcome. It was noted that this third meeting is an important one and it is important to have a clear outcome at the end.

Presentation of Lobachevsky University and its international programmes

Alexander Bedny, Vice-Rector for International Affairs at Lobachevsky University, gave an overview of the history of the university since its foundation as a people's university 100 years ago and presented the many major federal initiatives for Higher Education in which it participates. It is today a priority for the Russian government that Russian universities are internationally competitive. The number of foreign students at Lobachevsky University has increased by 50% in the last 3 years. The university is now developing programmes in English and even one in French.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The new agenda was adopted

3. Adoption of the minutes of the second meeting in London.

The minutes of the last meeting in London were agreed to with no changes.

4. Feedback from the BPF task force meeting

The French co-chair presented the work done with the Task force on the BPF concept note. The concept note aims at offering a background paper on the origins of the BPF, the lessons learnt, the next challenges and options to revisit the 2018 BPF and beyond. The outcomes of the discussion during this meeting will be presented in the next board (Podgorica) and BFUG (Bratislava).

The French co-chair stressed that by May 2017 the format and the programme for the next BPF would have to be fixed. She invited the participants to make suggestions about the line of direction for AG1 for 2018 and to identify one or two topics of global interest to be discussed at the next BPF. She emphasised the importance for the AG 1 to collaborate with partners outside Europe before the Conference and develop a partnership policy within a regional or continental scope (ASEAN, African Union, etc.). The co-chair also raised the question of more integration of the BPF in the Ministerial and of the purposes of the BPF: are we moving towards an "International Higher Education Summit" or a "Global Dialogue on Higher Education"?

The British co-chair asked the group to think about governance and autonomy as two possible topics for the next BPF as both are emerging as new challenges for universities to face. She pointed that terms are set in cultural contexts and that this also applies to the vocabulary used in Higher Education, the same words meaning different things in different regions of the world.

The importance of this problem is regularly encountered in the ESU meetings. The vocabulary of European Higher education is well codified inside Europe but leads to grave misunderstandings when in dialogue with students from outside Europe.

The representative from EAIE asked if the goal for the next BPF was to attract as many foreign participants as possible (at the ministerial level) or only people really interested in Higher Education.

The co-chairs replied that it was important to attract Ministers and high level stakeholders. The representative from the EU Commission argued that the BPF should focus on both constituencies.

Since a video conference was planned in the morning, this discussion went on in the afternoon.

Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)

The co-chairs asked Erol Kùlahci from AUF to present himself and the regional approach of his Agency. The AUF was created 50 years ago and has established numerous partnerships in 106 countries. Its activities are centered on regional dialogue and sustainable development. Asked about the presence of the Agency in Africa, the representative of AUF explained that the Agency has several offices in different regions of the continent and develops programmes following its three priorities: Quality Assurance, employability and role of higher education in a region in societal terms.

ASEAN and the SHARE project

Stefan Hell (British Council), Team Leader of SHARE, EU's new regional higher education support programme in the ASEAN region, joined the meeting through Skype.

He presented the SHARE project, designed to support ASEAN countries by bringing European expertise from the Bologna Process and EHEA. SHARE combines the expertise of British Council, Campus France, DAAD, EP-Nuffic, EUA and ENQA.

He explained that the Ministers for Education from the 10 member states sit at the ASEAN Education Bureau. The ministers hold regular meetings every two years. In 2016, they signed the 'ASEAN Declaration on Higher Education' around two main areas: student mobility in the region and TVET. There is a keen interest from the member states in meshing the education systems of the region; Malaysia has been chosen to lead this project in 2016-2017. However, funding is the main problem as each country contributes the same amount. There is also another important impediment to quick progress in negotiations - only three people are in charge of education for the whole ASEAN region which limits the capacity of the team. Stefan Hell also stressed that common structures were difficult to implement as countries tend to favor national schemes; national scholarships are well developed whereas there are no transnational funding grants available for students inside ASEAN. The existence of the South East Asia Ministers of Education Organization, a structure pre-dating ASEAN, has also to be taken into account, as it actually duplicates structures.

According to Stefan Hell, ASEAN looks at EHEA for inspiration and technical support on three main issues: the building of a credit transfer system, scholarships and the implementation of a qualifications reference framework. SHARE project has a budget of 10 M € for 4 years.

The British co-chair stressed that the example of SHARE showed that EHEA expertise on ECTS and Erasmus was a good example for developing an ASEAN regional space. This expertise is mainly needed on policy development, practical issues and technical elements. Stefan Hell added that SHARE is pushing for developing student participation, something that does not exist in these countries, due to tradition and political issues. A student focus dialogue event is scheduled in 2017.

Asked about possible cooperation between AUF and SHARE, the delegate from AUF responded that although his organization is very interested by the work done by SHARE it is not competitive enough to take part in SHARE's schemes. AUF projects are specifically targeted at universities and AUF's main interest is in social issues and education.

Stefan Hell highlighted the work done by UNESCO in the region.

In a response to a question about SHARE's links with European bodies and with development ministries in European countries, Stefan Hell explained that even his contacts with Brussels are limited and that most of the work is done at regional level.

Asked by the French co-chair if "developing a dialogue on the role of higher education in society" and "social inclusion to address global challenges" could appeal to the Ministers of the region, Stefan Hell responded that they indeed could but he reminded the audience that one has to pay attention to the way these ideas are phrased. The same, he said, is true for students' participation and organization.

The UNESCO representative was asked to present the role of his organization in the ASEAN region. UNESCO has a regional bureau in Bangkok and organizes annual workshops on several topics with ministries such as quality assurance and recognition. He stressed that the student mobility has enormously increased between North and South in the last years in the region.

Both the UNESCO and the SHARE representatives agreed on the good and effective links and collaborations between their organizations.

Asked by the representative of the EU Commission about collaboration with ASEM, Stefan Hell responded that they were struggling a bit with the ASEM structure which, anyway, does not play a big role in the ASEAN context. It would be interesting for SHARE to connect with ASEM but as already mentioned there is a real problem of capacity.

Boris Zhelezov presentation on “Internationalization of Higher Education in Russia: looking outside”

Boris Zhelezov, Deputy Head of the Bologna Working Group of the Russian Ministry of Education, gave a detailed overview of the many initiatives taken by Russian government and universities to organize and develop international relations as well as to raise Russian universities up the the world rankings. The new Russian Education law (2012) has put in place networks of study programmes, clear procedures for recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications.

Russia participates in many international organizations with an education and Higher Education agenda: UNESCO, ASEM, OECD, APEC as well as university networks inside other international organizations such as BRICS or SOC (Shanghai Cooperation Organization). Russia belongs to several international universities associations and has established more than 70 agreements on recognition and academic exchanges.

The British co-chair thanked Boris Zhelezov for his presentation and asked if Russia looked at APEC and EHEA for different things.

Boris Zhelezov stressed that APEC aims at developing a cohesive education community by 2030 (see the 2016 Declaration in Peru) but due to APEC's goals and structure it was only developing small targeted programmes on language and business. However, APEC is working on a mobility student card to be issued to students in the zone that will give them access to all education facilities in the future.

The French co-chair mentioned that a project of a ‘European student card’ was presented during the Paris meeting of Working Group 3 ‘New goals’. Should it become an output for the 2018 Ministerial, it could be interesting to think of a euro-regional student card with voluntary regions as a project beyond 2018.

The French co-chair stressed that the example of APEC shows that we have to take into account the complexity of what the expression “regional dialogue” can mean: are we talking of continents, blocs of countries, a common geographic centre or alliances like BRICS?

The British co-chair proposed to look at other organizations and how they operate.

Peter Wells, the UNESCO representative, explained that long life learning, equality and sustainable development goals are UNESCO's priorities. The organization strongly supports TVET and is looking for more articulation between TVET and HE. QA is also on the UNESCO agenda and a major conference is to be organised in June 2018 on QA in HE. Recognition conventions (including online learning) is a major issue for UNESCO in view of internationalization of countries' systems. The UNESCO representative stressed that today mobility is far less regional than global: for education and for global market of labour; countries have to see HE as a social tool and consequently institutions have to offer long term learning tools (short courses, etc.). He reminded the participants that the 3rd UNESCO World Conference was planned in 2020.

The British co-chair stressed that it is very challenging to engage universities in the TEVT debate, and that it would be difficult to get it onto the Agenda.

The EU Commission Representative asked about UNESCO's work with African countries.

There are UNESCO bureaus for each of the African regions. Many QA projects are going on in this part of the world. UNESCO is deeply aware that it must not to duplicate other organizations projects.

The ESU representative was asked about links between the main organization and its regional divisions. She pointed out that the main outcome of ESU's last international meeting was the recognition of the will of countries to work together. European delegates are aware that they are at risk of sounding too euro-centric, and not all regions share the same priorities. A major issue today for students from all around the world, regardless of level of development, is the funding of education which is at risk worldwide. She pointed out the development of a ‘global platform’ to register and analyse students movements and demonstrations.

The representative from EAIE also pointed out that Europe cannot appear to tell the rest of the world what to do. Agendas in other regions are very different to the European one. European countries must be aware that they have partners and need to give them a voice.

5. Discussion on the BPF Concept Note

The discussion began with the presentation of the guidelines for 2018 and the four topics proposed in the concept note: regional development of higher education areas, Sustainable development goals, Higher education for societal challenges in a global context, governance of higher education in a global context (see slide 3 of the PP presentation).

The Belgium Delegate pointed out that QA of Transnational Education was an important topic however not covered by the Yerevan Communiqué. He signalled that the overall aim is to increase mobility and academic collaboration and that to improve academic cooperation we need a common understanding of QA etc.

The Liechtenstein representative suggested that a possible topic, technical but also very political, would be the different approaches around the world to ECTS, recognition or QA, as key commitments for the implementation of regional areas of higher education. This should help set up the dialogue between different regions and countries.

The EU Commission representative suggested that we must focus on what interests other regions and what works in other countries. The two outcomes to be expected from the BPF should be: 1) best practices and 2) synergies. She stated that the Bologna process countries are quite advanced and can give a few lessons to others regarding gender equality and access to education.

The UNESCO representative agreed on the importance for other regions to effectively increase academic cooperation but stressed that it is not necessary to implement common ECTS. He asked the participants to be careful about what can be perceived as North-North approaches and to avoid the BPF to be seen as a marketing opportunity. Again, the UNESCO representative insisted that the EHEA does not have to put itself in the position of “donneur de leçons”. On the topic of “Higher Education for societal challenges in a global context”, the UNESCO representative stressed that this is typically seen by African and South-American countries as a local EHEA issue.

The representative from Cyprus suggested working on new schemes for international cooperation that would allow countries inside the Bologna process to offer programmes in other partner countries.

The ESU representative stressed that the general mood is against “internationalization” that students see as a tool used by European countries to assert their control on the field.

Boris Zhelezov intervened to point out that in his experience the purpose of increasing mobility was about ‘improving’ the region. The group had to think about what can interest ministers and it is likely that would be tools for comparability and measurement in Higher Education. The BPF could offer tool kits for a country better to understand where it stands in its own educational system, and can be used for improvement. This what Russia has been doing with its partners in BRICS.

Concerning “Governance of Higher Education in global context”, for the ESU representative this is a topic of much interest but that brings out a lot of difficulties.

For the EU commission representative this is not a topic to be discussed at the BPF.

The development of regional areas, the support to the SDG and the role of higher education to answer societal challenges appear to be more relevant topics. However it appeared that a general purpose had to be identified more clearly.

The EAIE representative asked what the group wanted the outcomes for the participants to the BPF to be? Will the BPF be a place where they come to exchange ideas and experiences? A place where to listen to experts? He argued that having a clear idea of the outcomes could help to decide on the topics.

The British co-chair said that the group had to think beyond “we want to attract ministers”. What the next BPF needs is Ministers to come to make changes happen.

On the format of the event

The Group discussed the level of integration to the conference: focused level integration / broad level integration. The main issue here will be to decide if the BPF would take place before, after, or during or partly during the Ministerial.

The ESU representative wanted to let the participants know that as the BPF will be happening 50 years after the May 1968 events, the students are planning to commemorate that anniversary. The British co-chair thanked her for the useful information.

6. Conclusions

The Group agreed on guidelines for 2018 (slide 3) and on the main purpose for the BPF: **'Enhancing international cooperation between regional higher education areas and systems.'**

The group also agreed on a proposal to be put forward to the BFUG to create some form of associated membership for non EHEA members. The details need to be agreed on but such a membership could be attractive and persuade Ministers to attend the Paris Ministerial. It could also be a useful framework for furthering the development of new topics.

The co-chairs asked for comments and suggestions from the participants.

Both Boris Zhelezov and the Belgium representative disagreed about the creation of an associated BFUG membership seen as too hierarchical and Euro-centric. The German representative criticized the term "associative membership" as ambiguous in the Bologna context. It could raise false expectations due to the lack of definition.

The co-chairs suggested the creation of an **"international alliance of regional higher education systems or areas"** (a specific platform with membership instead of a BFUG associated membership) to discuss the grand challenges of H.E for sustainable societies and economies (more mobility, more social inclusion, more collaborations at the academic level and between universities, civil society and businesses).

7. Next meeting in January 2017

The next meeting will take place in Madrid (Spain) on 30-31st of January 2017. The purpose of the meeting is to establish a fruitful inter-regional dialogue. Stakeholders from Latin America, Sub-Sahel Africa, Mediterranean, North Africa and Arabic countries have been invited.

The final meeting of the AG1 should take place before summer 2017. Germany but also the EU commission and AUF in Brussels are candidates for organizing the event.

8. A.O.B.

The ESU representative sent the link to the website for the global education campaign they launched -Fund Our future- the website will host information and ideas on running campaigns, showcase the work of student movements globally, and act as a platform to build relationships and networks between student movements around the world- please do have a look, sign the pledge and share in your networks.

On the website you can also find a link to the *Bergen declaration* - a joint statement developed by representatives from student movements from Asia, North and South America, Europe, Africa and the Pacific. This statement sets out the values and principles we believe underpin education, and acts as a unifying document for the global student voice moving forward.

<http://www.globalstudentvoice.org/en/fund-our-future/>

Annex: Presentations

AG1 Nihzny concept note PP