



## BFUG Meeting LXXVIII

Hosted by Slovenia, Online  
1-2 December 2021

### Minutes

### List of Participants

Delegation	First Name	Family Name(s)
Albania (BFUG Vice-Chair)	Linda	Pustina
Albania	Anila	Paparisto
Andorra (Outgoing BFUG Co-chair)	Jordi	Llombart
Andorra	Mar	Martinez
Armenia (BFUG Co-chair)	Tatevik	Gharibyn
Armenia	Karen	Trchounian
Armenia	Elina	Asriyan
Austria (BICG Co-Chair)	Helga	Posset
Austria	Stephan	De Pasqualin
Austria	Stephan	Wran
Azerbaijan (Incoming Co-Chair)	Nijat	Mammadli
Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova
Belarus	Elena	Betenya
Belgium Flemish Community	Magalie	Soenen
Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Aida	Đurić
Bulgaria	Ivana	Radonova
Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
Council of Europe	Katia	Dolgova-Dreyer
Croatia (WG on Social Dimension, Co-Chair)	Ninoslav S.	Schmidt
Croatia	Dijana	Mandic
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
Cyprus	Yiannis	Kasoulides
Czech Republic	Veronika	Schmidtova
Denmark	Anders	Mihle
ENQA	Douglas	Blackstock
ENQA	Maria	Kelo

28	EQAR	Karl	Dittrich
29	EQAR	Colin	Tück
30	Estonia	Janne	Pukk
31	ESU	Martina	Darmanin
32	ESU	Jakub	Grodecki
33	EI-ETUCE	Andreas	Keller
34	EI-ETUCE	Agnes	Roman
35	EUA	Michael	Gaebel
36	EURASHE	Alicia	Miklavcic
37	EURASHE	Ana	Tecilazic
38	European Commission	Vanessa	Debiais-Sainton
39	European Commission	Kinga	Szuly
40	European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova
41	European Commission	Tine	Delva
42	European Commission (CG on GPD, Co-Chair)	Fiorella	Perotto
43	European Commission/Eurydice	David	Crosier
44	EUROSTUDENT	Kristina	Hauschildt
45	Finland	Maija	Innola
46	France (Incoming Co-Chair)	Patrick	Nédellec
47	France	Manuel	Bouard
48	France	Mathieu	Musquin
49	Georgia	Kakha	Khandolishvili
50	Georgia	Maia	Shukhoshvili
51	Germany	Marius	Michalski
52	Germany	Marit	Metternich
53	Greece	Alexandra	Karvouni
54	Greece	Yiannis	Katsanevakis
55	Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
56	Hungary	Marianna	Bodolai-Marcsek
57	Iceland	Una	Strand Viðarsdóttir
58	Ireland	Joseph	Gleeson
59	Ireland	Padraig	Hennigan
60	Ireland (WG on Learning and Teaching, Co-Chair)	Terry	Maguire
61	Italy	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
62	Italy	Vincenzo	Zara
63	Italy	Luca	Lantero
64	Kazakhstan	Banu	Narbekova
65	Kazakhstan	Kamila	Sugirbekova
66	Kazakhstan	Akzhunis	Artykbay
67	Kazakhstan	Yerbol	Moldakassimov
68	Kazakhstan	Alisher	Tulemissov
69	Latvia	Daiga	Ivsina
70	Liechtenstein	Daniel	Miescher
71	Liechtenstein	Belgin	Amann
72	Lithuania	Andrius	Zalitis
73	Luxembourg	Isabelle	Reinhardt

74	Malta	Rose Anne	Cuschieri
75	Moldova	Nadejda	Velisco
76	The Netherlands	Berto	Bosscha
77	The Netherlands	Emmy	Heijmans
78	The Netherlands	Sophie	Duijser
79	North Macedonia	Borco	Aleksov
80	Norway	Tone Flood	Strøm
81	Poland	Agnieszka	Czembrowska
82	Portugal (Outgoing Co-Chair)	Joao	Figueiredo
83	Romania	Cristina	Ghițulică
84	Romania	Mihai Cezar	Haj
85	Russian Federation	Nadezda	Kamynina
86	Russian Federation	Inna	Ponomareva
87	San Marino	Remo	Massari
88	San Marino	Monica	Cavalli
89	San Marino	Maria Elena	D'Amelio
90	Serbia	Bojan	Tubic
91	Serbia	Vanja	Nedeljkovic
92	Slovak Republic	Peter	Ondreicka
93	Slovenia (BFUG Co-Chair)	Duša	Marjetić
94	Slovenia	Darinka	Vrecko
95	Slovenia	Marija	Skerlj
96	Slovenia	Andrej	Kotnik
97	Spain	Juan Carlos	Parodi Roman
98	Sweden	Robin	Moberg
99	Switzerland	Aurélia	Robert-Tissot
100	Turkey	Tuncay	Döğeroğlu
101	Turkey	Elif	Huntürk
102	Ukraine	Kateryna	Suprun
103	UNESCO	Peter	Wells
104	UNESCO	Vanja	Gutovic
105	United Kingdom	Colin	Attrill
106	United Kingdom/Scotland	Michael	Watney
107	United Kingdom/Scotland	Dehra	Macdonald
108	BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
109	BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
110	BFUG Secretariat	Alesia	Gegushi
111	BFUG Secretariat	Aida	Myrto
112	BFUG Secretariat	Enis	Fita

## Welcome addresses

Opening remarks by Dr. Mitja Slavinec, Slovenia, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

Dr. Mitja Slavinec welcomed everybody to the 78th meeting of the BFUG, underlining the commitment of higher education ministers to an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by 2030 and entrusting the BFUG to implement the Rome Communique (2020) statements into the 2021-2024 work plan. He

stressed that enhancing synergies between education and research and innovation policies was an important priority of the Slovenian Presidency in support of even better linking the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European Education Area (EEA) and European Research Area (ERA). The joint meeting of Directors General for Higher Education and of the members of the ERA and Innovation Committee that took place in Ljubljana in September, 2021 was highlighted for its focus on the synergies between education and research. The Slovenian Presidency encourages the employment of a systematic approach and establishment of joint meetings at all levels for the effective link of both policy fields. An open discussion is necessary to work towards an efficient co-creation process and implementation of the European strategy for universities. One concrete step is to promote a closer cooperation between the BFUG Task force on synergies and the ERA Forum-Higher education sector sub-group. Dr. Slavinec concluded that the Slovenian Presidency, in collaboration with the European Commission, will bring the decisions of the BFUG on the proposal of the TF on synergies to the attention of the relevant EU governance structures.

#### Opening remarks by Dr. Karen Trchounian, Armenia, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports

Dr. Karen Trchounian welcomed everyone to the BFUG meeting, emphasizing the necessity of connecting higher education and research, noting the Bologna process as an outstanding example of how to create synergies between these two sectors, as well as between countries. Dr. Trchounian stated that the overall concept of higher education should be revised, thus this ought to be a topic for future discussions. Moreover, Armenia has introduced a bill on higher education and science, which is awaiting ratification. Following that, a reform of Armenian higher education and science is underway, with greater focus on soft skills.

Dr. Slavinec and Dr. Trchounian wished for a successful meeting and for an efficient connectedness of higher education and science.

## **2. Welcome and introduction to the meeting**

### 1.1. Welcome by the BFUG Co-Chairs (Slovenia, Armenia)

Duša Marjetič (Co-Chair, Slovenia) welcomed everyone to the BFUG's 78th meeting and thanked the outgoing Co-Chairs for their support and commitment. Ms. Marjetič emphasized the Slovenian Presidency of the European Council's priority on synergies between higher education and research, as well as between the EHEA, EEA and ERA.

Tatevik L. Gharibyan (Co-Chair, Armenia) thanked the Chairs for their support during the BFUG Board meeting and for the opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of the EHEA. Ms. Gharibyan emphasized the necessity of enhancing cooperation by expanding the scope of shared interests in education, research and innovation.

### 1.2. Welcome by the BFUG Vice-Chair (Albania)

Linda Pustina (Vice-Chair, Albania) greeted the meeting and wished for future meetings to be held in person or in a hybrid format. She highlighted that despite the difficult situation, the work of the various BFUG working structures has continued intensively. Ms. Pustina acknowledged the great collaboration with the BFUG Co-Chairs, smooth transition with the outgoing Co-Chairs and the continuous support to all the working structures by the BFUG Secretariat.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

For more detailed information, please see: [BFUG SI AM 78 Draft Agenda](#)

For more detailed information, please see: [BFUG SI AM 78 Draft Annotated Agenda](#)

### **3. Information by the outgoing BFUG Co-Chairs**

João Carlos Figueiredo (Portugal) expressed appreciation in hosting the BFUG meeting on April 15-16, 2021, and thanked Mr. Joseph Areny (Director General of Education, Andorra) and Prof. Manuel Heitor (Minister of Science, Technology, and Higher Education, Portugal). He also thanked the outgoing Co-Chair of Andorra, the Current Co-Chairs, Vice-Chair and BFUG Secretariat for their continuous collaboration and support. Finally, he mentioned the cordial and collaborative way in which the previous BFUG meeting took place, with the approval of the Work Plan and Rules of Procedure (2021-2024), as well as the creation of two new task forces. Jordi Llombart (Outgoing Co-Chair, Andorra) expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be part of an enriching process, through the involvement in the BFUG's operations. Mr. Llombart thanked the outgoing Co-Chairs from Portugal and Vice-Chair for their support and collaboration. He praised the BFUG Secretariat's degree of dedication and high-quality work, under the direction of Ms. Enida Bezhani. Mr. Llombart concluded by wishing the current and the incoming Co-Chairs success in their upcoming works.

### **4. Information on the BFUG Board meeting**

Tatevik Gharibyan (Co-Chair, Armenia) provided a summary of the BFUG Board meeting, hosted by Armenia, online, on 21 October 2021. Three items had been added to the agenda of the Board meeting at the request of consultative members:

- EQAR requested that the wording of EQAR's representation in the Rules of Procedure (2021-2024) and on the EHEA website be changed. EQAR is a non-voting member with a status comparable to that of a consultative member, however it is not a consultative member. As a result, it was suggested that the wording in quotation ("*but has so far not been officially named consultative member*") be removed. The request was confirmed with no objections.
- EUROSTUDENT requested the Board to designate one BFUG representative to the EUROSTUDENT steering board, followed up via an Expression of Interest Call. With one application received from Mr. Yiannis Katsanevakis, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Greece, the EUROSTUDENT representative from the BFUG was approved.
- ESU supported by the EUA, EURASHE, and ENQA requested that the issue of the scheduled Belarusian Co-Chairmanship be put on the agenda for the Board meeting's agenda.

Ms. Gharibyan concluded the briefing by stating that all BFUG working structures reported on their progress.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board SI AM 77 Minutes of Meeting](#)

### **5. Update from the BFUG Secretariat**

Oltion Rrumbullaku (BFUG Secretariat, Head) introduced himself as the new appointed Head of the Secretariat. He delivered an overview of the key processes and activities undertaken by the BFUG Secretariat since the last BFUG meeting, mainly a summary of all the meetings organized. Mr. Rrumbullaku presented the Work Plan for the period 2021-2024, highlighting the establishment of new working structures in comparison to the previous period, as well that work in all BFUG working structures has begun or is now underway. He stated that communication with the incoming Co-Chairs has already commenced, and expressed gratitude for the CoE's training and the Vice-Chair and Co-Chairs' support during this transition, particularly for the organization of the BFUG meeting. The BFUG welcomed the new Head of the BFUG Secretariat and thanked the Secretariat for the work and preparation of this meeting, during the period of transition. Members of the BFUG expressed strong appreciation for the work done by the previous Head of the Secretariat during her tenure. The Secretariat was advised to convey more detailed messages to delegations. The Head of the Secretariat thanked everyone for their suggestions on how to enhance the Secretariat's work in the future.

## **6. Update from the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)**

Helga Posset (Co-Chair, BICG) provided an update on the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group, including its composition and ToRs for the 2021-2024 work period, as well as a briefing on the topics discussed in the first and second BICG meetings. Furthermore, she gave an overview of the work of the 3 TPGs including the membership of each peer group, organization of meetings and the timeline for the finalization of the Work Plans and Country Plans for each TPG. The issue of non-EU countries being unable to participate in the Erasmus+ Call due to the call restrictions, despite being EHEA country members was also raised. It was highlighted that for the next Call, the European Commission will find a solution for the non-EU countries to participate as well. Ms. Posset stressed the importance of commencing the Erasmus+ projects, so that the TPGs may begin their work through the Umbrella Projects and avoid project delays.

For more detailed information, please see: [BFUG Board SI AM 78 BICG Update.](#)

## **7. Information on the Declaration of Intent by the Baltic States and the Benelux member states on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Degrees**

Berto Bosscha (The Netherlands) highlighted the importance of improving the higher education area and presented a short video on *Cross border student and labour mobility*, aimed at students to further explain mobility and automatic recognition (AR). Sophie Duijser (The Netherlands) elaborated on the importance of AR, adding that this commitment has been repeatedly included in previous Communiqués. The three objectives of the treaty were outlined: mutual trust in education; increased transparency in recognition; contribution to the EHEA. It was stated that other countries are welcome to join the treaty provided that the treaty conditions are met. The Council of Europe indicated that AR has become a more concrete area and a good initiative for international collaboration, even if the term itself can easily be understood to promise more than it can deliver by those not familiar with the EHEA policy discussions. It was also suggested for ENQA, WG on Monitoring and DEQAR to further cooperate on deciding whether the system and procedures are in compliance with the ESG. A remark was made by ETUCE on the signatures of the treaty, with some parties having yet to sign it. The EC welcomed the Declaration of Intent and underlined the importance of implementation of automatic recognition on an EU level, in line with the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition of qualifications and learning periods, adopted in 2018. It was stressed that AR progressed since the adoption of the Council Recommendation, nevertheless the full implementation still requires considerable efforts, in at least 18 Member States. The EC welcomed the work of ENQA and DEQAR on building trust on this process for those involved. It was stated that the six countries are in communication and that the procedure is transparent and efficient. The Council of Europe stated that it is monitoring AR within countries as part of the regular monitoring of the implementation of Lisbon Recognition Convention, which will be finalized and be made available by November, 2022 for the next meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. Ms. Duijser stated that all this input will be considered with treaty members at the next meeting.

For more detailed information, please see: [BFUG Presentation Treaty Automatic Presentation NL](#)

## **8. Updates from the BFUG Working Structures**

### **8.1. Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process**

David Crosier (Co-Chair, WG on Monitoring) gave an update on the WG on Monitoring, stating that two meetings have been organized thus far. The first meeting focused on the evaluation of the 2020 Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR), Terms of Reference and objectives for the 2024 BPIR, while the second meeting focused on developing a proposal for the structure of the 2024 BPIR. The principles behind the proposal were: following the commitments of the Rome Communiqué; co-operation and co-responsibility with other WGs; readability and avoiding information overload; and feasibility of production. Mr. Crosier described the elements of the proposed structure of the 2024 BPIR and the six chapters proposed. He emphasized that the chapters will be integrated into one report, but with the

possibility to download the chapters independently. The possibility of publishing data digitally on the EHEA website is to be explored. Tone Flood Strøm (Co-Chair, WG on Monitoring) added that the feedback received from the WG members on the 2020 report was highly positive, and that good discussions on the structure of and indicators in the next report had taken place. The 2024 report will be more of a normal report focusing on progress in the agreed commitments, as opposed to the 2020 edition which was more of a stand-alone edition focusing on main developments over time. Some of the current indicators need revision and some may no longer be applicable, but the group had good discussions on what to include in the 2024 report. Co-operation with the other WGs is essential, as the group has to liaise with the other WGs in order to develop indicators. Co-operation is well established and working well with the BICG and the WGs on Fundamental Values and Social Dimension, and a working relationship with the WG on Learning and Teaching will be established. The next meeting is scheduled for the spring, and the BFUG's recommendations and comments to the draft will be taken into account and included into the group's work.

It was suggested that the report include more information on the working conditions of academic staff, as well as on the extent to which short cycle qualifications and micro-credentials are incorporated into National Qualification Frameworks. The lack of sources may pose a challenge for reporting on the working conditions of academic staff, but the Co-Chairs agreed to bring this back to the group.

For more detailed information, please see: [Proposed Structure of 2024 BPIR for BFUG](#)

## 8.2. Working Group on Fundamental Values

Cezar Haj (Co-Chair, WG on FV) provided an update on the two meetings of this WG and informed the members about the project proposal of the Erasmus+ call, planned to be implemented by Romania and Norway in collaboration with ESU, DAAD, and EUA as associated partners, as well as international experts. The activity of the group had focused on mapping, analyzing, and proposing indicators to monitor the FV. Mr. Haj also mentioned that this WG attended the DAAD conference on the FV in the EHEA, which was beneficial to the WG's work. The next steps included organizing hearings with researchers on the existing concepts for the three remaining FV similar to the procedure of the Task Force on FV from 2018 to 2020, forming a common understanding in terms of the conceptual framework definition and developing indicators.

A study financed by the Council of Europe on the relationship between Fundamental Values and Quality Assurance was highlighted, with the goal of providing an overview of the extent to which Quality Assurance (QA) agencies use FV in their quality evaluations, and if so, which values are most taken into account. This study will be made available to the WG on FV, as soon as the results are finalized.

## 8.3. Working Group on Social Dimension

Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Co-Chair, WG on SD) gave an overview of the WG on SD's progress thus far, emphasizing the relevance of the revised definition of SD, the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs), and the necessity to establish a framework for the implementation of the PAGs. Mr. Schmidt stated that this WG will collaborate closely with the WG on Monitoring, EUROSTUDENT and other European databases to build a monitoring system and indicators for the PAGs. The WG will work on the organization of peer learning activities, the development of tools, indicators, and benchmarks for the implementation of the PAGs for social dimension, as well as the development of a monitoring system, all of which will be done in accordance with the work methods agreed upon in the Work Plan 2024. The Erasmus+ project application ("Peer Learning Activities and Resources to Underpin the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension"), had been submitted successfully on the October call in 2021 and a summary of the peer-learning activities that had been completed thus far was provided. It was determined to organize five meetings per year, with all necessary materials (workplans, meeting presentations, and resources) being made available on the EHEA website.

For more detailed information, please see: [WG on SD, Overview of Progress 2021](#)

#### 8.4. Working Group on Learning & Teaching

Terry Maguire (Co-Chair, WG on L&T) gave an overview of the group's first meeting, highlighting specific actions such as a peer learning approach to support country members in developing concrete national actions; a mapping of the challenges and actions within EHEA based on the recommendations of the WG's survey; defining the key priorities for the group's work plan, one of which was student-centered learning; and finding ways to fit micro-credentials into the group's work plan. The formation of a sub-group was proposed as a means of exchanging ideas and offering new directions. The next meeting was scheduled for the end of January 2022.

The changes to assessment practice that have accelerated during the pandemic, as well as the relationship between quality teaching and working conditions were recognized as vital components in the work of the group. It was also suggested that this WG collaborate with the WG on Social Dimension, as social dimension principles should be incorporated into learning and teaching. This proposal was viewed as highly beneficial to both groups and was decided to be followed up after this meeting to discuss possible synergies.

#### 8.5. Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue

Fiorella Perotto (Co-chair, CG on GPD) provided an overview of the state-of-play of the CG on GPD, including the membership and information on the kick-off meeting. The group's goals were outlined as: identifying concrete actions to mitigate the negative effects of crises through international cooperation; forming sub-groups to focus on macro regions and the involvement of regional and sub-regional organizations; participating in global and regional events; organizing the upcoming Global Policy Forum (GPF) and statement in 2024. A clear work plan was agreed to be constructed which would include the development of effective communication tools with macro regions (Asia; Africa; The Americas). The group agreed that its activities should emphasize inclusion and pragmatic learning about different regional models, in order to determine how they might be connected within the Bologna Process.

A structural issue of the GPF was highlighted, as there are no means yet to advance the global dimension between ministerial conferences. As several nations have expressed interest in becoming EHEA members and presenting their own educational systems, this issue will need to be addressed between ministerial conferences and the GPF.

#### 8.6. Working Group on San Marino Roadmap

Jordi Llombart (Co-Chair, WG on SMR) acknowledged the great collaboration with the San Marino authorities and their progress in the process of implementing the key principles at national level. Mr. Llombart gave information on the two meetings organized thus far, highlighting the interaction with the stakeholders during the second, in-presence meeting in San Marino, as well as a detailed overview of the HE system in San Marino. By mid-January 2022, it was highlighted that two significant theme meetings will be conducted, one on quality assurance and the other on governance, with specific specialists on the subject. The next meeting of the entire WG will take place in March 2022. Elena D'Amelio (San Marino) presented the state-of-play of the implementation of the San Marino Roadmap, underlining the completion of the first draft of the NQF, introduction of the new legislation and the involvement of stakeholders (i.e., trade unions, business organizations, etc.). A second draft is planned to be delivered in March, 2022 which will incorporate general competences for each cycle in the NQF. San Marino has already identified a quality assurance agency for external quality assurance of its higher education.

A remark was made by EQAR on the proposed external QA agency by San Marino, AVEPRO. It was discussed whether the country could employ this agency, as it is not EQAR-registered. Although not obligatory, it was stressed that EQAR is the official means of the EHEA to certify ESG compliance resulting in the highest scorecard category within the Bologna Implementation Reports<sup>1</sup>. Thus, EQAR

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<sup>1</sup> "Scorecard indicator n°4 is designed to show how far quality assurance systems have developed in alignment with these agreed Bologna commitments. Systems in the dark green category are working with quality assurance agencies that have



representative encouraged AVEPRO and other non-EQAR registered agencies to apply to become EQAR registered agencies. Nonetheless, as underlined by the Holy See and the Council of Europe, AVEPRO has demonstrated ESG compliance through ENQA membership and assessment. Furthermore, as indicated in the roadmap, which has been agreed by the ministers, there is no obligation for countries to choose an EQAR accredited agency. Independently of this, San Marino specified that it is solely expressing an interest in this agency, and that the selection of a QA Agency will be addressed further at the next meeting in January, 2022. It was approved by the BFUG that Maria Kelo, member of this WG, continues to collaborate regardless of the change in position from ENQA to EUA by the end of 2021.

For more detailed information, please see: [Working Group on San Marino Roadmap](#)

For more detailed information, please see: [Working Group on San Marino Roadmap BFUG Report](#)

#### 8.7. Network of National Qualifications Frameworks Correspondents

Katia Dolgova-Dreyer (CoE) delivered an update on the EHEA Network of NQF Correspondents' annual meeting, noting that the participation rate for this meeting was significantly higher than previously, with 35 country representatives. The discussions on the advancement of the self-certification processes showed that there was large disparity between countries with some having achieved self-certification years ago and some still in the adoption stage. With regards to the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, some of the competences introduced by the CoE have already been included in the QFs, with Andorra and Germany as good examples. Moreover, the role of distance learning and acknowledgement of new processes of e-learning were significantly highlighted in the present academic community. Micro-credentials were also a key topic of the agenda. The CoE also announced that it has decided to produce a new publication focusing on tools for modernization, within the QF of the EHEA, and will be shared with the BFUG once available.

For more detailed information, please see: [QF annual meeting 2021 short report BFUG](#)

#### 8.9. Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community

Luca Lantero (Co-Chair, TF on Knowledge-sharing) presented the work done by the TF on Knowledge sharing in the EHEA community, emphasizing that the TF will draft a detailed work plan, an interim report will be completed after the first year. He also highlighted that within the first meeting of the TF, ESU presented the "Bologna with Student Eyes" study, which provided valuable insight into students' perceptions on the EHEA. The IN-GLOBAL joint project proposal was introduced, that supports both the work of the TF and CG on GPD, detailing the partners (Italy and Romania) and work package divisions between the two working structures.

There was an extensive discussion on the TF's mandate; countries did not oppose for the duration of the TF to last longer than 1 year, but the general agreement was that final decisions concerning the durations of TFs is up to the BFUG. Mr. Lantero stated that an electronic consultation was held on this topic, with no member opposing the mandate duration to be until 2024, adding that the one-year time frame was insufficient to finish the TF objectives. The BFUG Co-Chairs decided to place this matter on the agenda of the next BFUG Board meeting to prepare a discussion at the BFUG meeting in April 11-12, 2022.

#### 8.10 Task Force to Increase Synergies between the European Higher Education Area, the Higher Education Dimension of the European Education Area and the European Research Area

Duša Marjetić (Co-Chair, TF on Synergies) presented the aim of the proposal as a discussion on how to mobilize the Bologna structures in the context of the EEA's higher education dimension and develop

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been evaluated to show that they are working in accordance with ESG, and this is demonstrably proven through registration on the EQAR. Countries in the light green category also operate a system with quality assurance agencies evaluated to ensure that they comply with the ESG, or declaring that they are fully aligned with the ESG. However, in this case they have not registered on the EQAR", The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report, Chapter 3, p. 72-73.

synergies with the ERA. The proposal contained a list of possible areas for cooperation, as well as the methodology for organizing synergies between the three sectors. Tine Delva noted that two meetings had already been held to discuss the mobilization of Bologna structures and the task areas to be addressed. The proposal was agreed by members to be taken forward for discussion within the respective entities under the EEA and ERA, so that synergies can be realized. Strong support for the operationalization of the synergies across the three areas was emphasized by the members.

The need to include countries that are members of the EHEA but not the ERA in the discussion was stressed by many members. Ms. Marjetić said that information exchange and joint events might be considered suitable approaches to communicate information with countries outside of EEA and ERA. Another comment concerned the wording employed, stating that references to “science” and “research” were not interchangeable. Moreover, the TF was praised for not proposing a whole new structure on top of the present one. Aside from the BFUG and the bodies responsible for EEA and ERA, the significance of national coordination was also underlined. It was suggested that the relevant areas of cooperation be prioritized, with academic freedom and research freedom as the starting points. The importance of university synergies was underlined, as was the topic of transnational collaboration between HEIs and research centers. The importance of the fundamental values topic was emphasized from both the ERA and the EHEA perspectives. Proposals made by the BFUG would be considered in the final draft of the document. The document would be sent to the EEA and ERA structures, and the outcomes of the upcoming discussions would be presented at the next BFUG meeting.

For more detailed information, please see: [TF on Synergies’ Proposal](#)

## **9. Possible modification of the order of the BFUG Co-Chairmanship**

In a short introduction the Co-Chair informed the participants that several documents regarding the Belarus BFUG Co-Chairmanship, foreseen for autumn 2022, had been circulated to BFUG members and consultative members ahead of the meeting.

In keeping with its written proposal, ESU stated that they would avoid to have Belarus serve as Co-Chair for the autumn period 2022, due to the recent events in Belarus in breach of the fundamental values of the EHEA and the expulsions of students and academic staff. This position had been presented to and coordinated with member unions in Belarus, and it was reinforced and supported in resolution by the Belarusian Students Association. The proposal does not suggest that Belarus should be expelled from the BFUG; on the contrary, ESU indicated its readiness to collaborate with Belarus and its academic and student community. It was clarified that there is no procedural obstacle for the BFUG to rearrange the order of Co-Chairmanship. Thus, the Slovenian Co-Chair made a proposal to Belarus to postpone its Co-Chairmanship until the presentation of the Belarus Roadmap Implementation Report to the BFUG that is to be submitted by the end of 2023, as being members of the Board, and/or being the Co-Chairing country, while presenting that report at the same time could be regarded as a conflict of interest. One of the possibilities would be for Belarus to change places of Co-Chairing with another non-EU country which is on the Co-Chairing list at a later period, after the Ministerial Conference in 2024.

The proposal was received by the Belarus representatives, who requested to consult on this matter with their respective national authorities. Thus, the discussion on the possible modification of the order of the BFUG Co-Chairmanship was postponed to the second day of the meeting and the meeting agenda was revised accordingly.

The discussion on this item continued the following day when the Belarus delegation informed the BFUG that the proposal suggested by the Co-Chair was not accepted, thus they would like to Co-Chair the BFUG in the period stated in the Rules of Procedure. The Belarus delegation explained that Belarus has consistently implemented the Bologna Process tools in their national HE system, initially within the framework of the Belarus Roadmap and then within the framework of the national strategy. The implementation reports have been annually submitted to the BFUG Board and for that reason Belarus wishes to pursue their Co-Chairing as initially planned.

The European Commission quoted the speech of Commission President Von der Leyen in the European parliament on [November 23, 2021](#), stating that the EU does not recognize the Belarus regime. The Belarus Co-Chairmanship would mean that a country that overtly violates the shared fundamental values of the EHEA would act as an official representative of the EHEA. The Council of Europe indicated that the BFUG has the competence to decide on the order of Co-Chairmanship and ought to reach a decision today. A discussion proceeded on the proposal to postpone the Co-Chairmanship of Belarus until after the 2024 Ministerial Conference. The outcome of the discussion indicated that no delegation except Belarus supported that the Co-Chairmanship order should be maintained. A strong majority of members supported ESU's proposal on the postponement of the Belarus Co-Chairmanship. A minority indicated that if a vote was to be taken, they would abstain, stating that in their view voting would not respect the principle of consensus of the BFUG and/or the question was not within the representatives' competence to decide. The Co-Chair summarized the discussion by indicating that there was strong support for the proposal of postponement, as well as for the procedural intervention by the Council of Europe.

The BFUG therefore decided to postpone the Co-Chairmanship of Belarus. Following this decision, it was decided that the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat perform a written consultation with the other non-EU countries in line to co-chair with a view to identifying a Co-Chair for autumn 2022 and to prepare a revised schedule of the Co-Chairmanship for the 2021 – 24 period before the end of December 2021<sup>2</sup>.

For more information, please see: [Background Note](#)

For more information, please see: [ESU Letter](#)

For more information, please see: [Belarus Note](#)

For more information, please see: [Holy See Note](#)

For more information, please see: [Statement to the BFUG](#)

## **10. Update from the European Commission on the European Strategy for Universities and on the application for projects**

Vanessa Debais-Sainton introduced the upcoming initiatives of the European Commission: European Strategy for Universities and the proposal to the members states to further improve transnational cooperation between HEIs across Europe, the Council Recommendation on a European Approach to micro-credentials, and the Learning for Environmental Sustainability. It was noted that global challenges like digitalization, climate change and demographic shifts have been accelerated by the pandemic. Hence, HEIs should be supported to respond to these challenges. This is why the EC proposed in December 2021 a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, to boost recognition and further development of micro-credentials, ensuring that they may be utilized in a comparable manner. It was stressed that the development of micro-credentials should complement, not replace traditional qualifications. The new European Strategy, expected to be published early 2022 together with a Council Recommendation, will support transnational mobility and cooperation, with focus on quality, inclusivity, fundamental academic values and support for HEIs for the digital and green transition. The EC stressed that one of the greatest assets of European higher education is its diversity. The proposals intend to give an opportunity for the EU and national governments to collaborate and assist HEIs in new ways. The strategy will be based on shared vision and long-term focus on sustainability, excellence and European values, built on the experiences of the European Universities Alliances. These alliances are jointly delivering student-centered curricula across university campuses, where diverse student bodies can experience transnational mobility at all levels of study and by adopting a challenge-based approach in which students, academics and external partners can collaborate in inter-disciplinary teams to address the most pressing issues. The EC concluded its presentation by mentioning the upcoming proposal for Council Recommendation to outline actions on the role of education for the green transition.

Kinga Szuly presented an outline of the Erasmus+ Program support for the EHEA. The call for proposals, published every 2 years, aims to support EHEA countries to address the gaps identified in the Bologna

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<sup>2</sup> After the meeting, Kazakhstan accepted to co-chair the BFUG in autumn 2022.

Process Implementation Report (2020) and priorities of the Rome communique. EC indicated that the main topics of the submitted proposals focused on quality assurance, recognition, social inclusion, learning & teaching, academic freedom, micro-credentials, qualification frameworks. All together 16 applications were submitted. The participating countries and organisations included EU and non-EU countries. It was noted that the requested budget surpassed the call's anticipated budget, and that this issue would need to be addressed. The proposals are currently being evaluated and information on the successful proposals will be released in early 2022, following contract signatures for a three-year project duration.

## **11. Updates from the Consultative Members**

### 11.1. Update from the Council of Europe

Katia Dolgova-Dreyer gave a brief update on the CoE's most recent meeting of its Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice, with Ms. Maija Innola elected as the new Chair of the committee. It was also indicated that a large portion of 'The Council of Europe Contribution to the EHEA 2021-24' report was devoted to drafting the education strategy, which will expectantly be completed and delivered in the Ministerial Conference (spring 2024).

For more information, please see: [The Council of Europe Contribution to the EHEA \(2021-24\)](#)

### 11.2. Update from Education International/ETUCE

Andreas Keller highlighted ETUCE's activities following the BFUG meeting, particularly its positions on EU measures affecting European Universities, the European Research Area and the European Strategy for Universities. One initiative was highlighted to attract attention to social dialogue in education under the guidance of the EU, in partnership with social partner, EFEE. The need of appropriate social exchanges was emphasized in workshop activities, held in Lisbon, as part of the project's scope to produce high-quality academic teaching. A Resolution on "Campaigning for a Better Future for Higher Education and Research" was approved during ETUCE's Extraordinary Conference in July 2021. The Conference urged governments to ensure that the whole academic community had access to the "right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning," as outlined by the EU's European Pillar of Social Rights. In addition, a greater balance of research and teaching in academia, as well as quality checks to ensure that the impact of the pandemic does not damage certain groups of employees, should be achieved to advocate Open Educational Resources (OER). More information on this Resolution, as well as other Resolutions can be found on the ETUCE website.

For more information, please see: [ETUCE Activity report on higher education and research](#)

### 11.3. Update from ENQA

Douglas Blackstock introduced himself as the new president of ENQA, highlighting further changes within the ENQA structures. It was noted that ENQA will further increase its support to members through activities such as the ENQA leadership development programme and the independent agency reviews. Furthermore, the importance of sharing and developing best practices in quality assurance, as well as developing and delivering new QA methodologies, was emphasized. ENQA's priorities focus on developments in QA after the pandemic, including issues of e-learning, assessment, student rights and quality of online processes. The organization places high value on flexibility and support for HEIs by adjusting methods, providing reassurance and ensuring a fair approach to granting and renewing accreditation status in times of the pandemic. According to Mr. Blackstock, there is widespread consensus that hybrid models are the way of the future for operational procedures. Finally, he stated that academic integrity has become a growing concern, with credential mills, accreditation mills, and bogus institutions emerging in recent years through cross-border operations in a variety of countries. As a result, serious measures to counteract academic fraud should be taken.

#### 11.4. Update from EQAR

Colin Tück provided an overview of the organization's activities, indicating that more agencies have enrolled and that targeted evaluations in the registration/renewal of long-term registered agencies has become vital. This method was discussed with ENQA, with the goal of not duplicating or rechecking already confirmed issues. To address the findings from agency reviews and registration decisions, a webinar was held, highlighting ESG criteria that have shown to be more complex for agencies to comply with. Related to this, EQAR's goal is to create a much closer relationship between the agency and the system level, as the agency is heavily influenced by the national framework and legislation, to address identified issues as a result of the registration process. The DEQAR CONNECT project, was also mentioned, which focuses on the expansion of the database and the connection of DEQAR to other systems. One example is the work with ENIC-NARICs so that DEQAR data may be instantly integrated into the recognition process, making it more automated. Mr. Tück concluded this update by inviting everyone to the DEQAR CONNECT Conference.

#### 11.5. Update from ESU

Martina Darmanin gave an update on ESU's work, highlighting the strategic priorities and policy statements on higher education quality. The ESU report takes into account the present conditions, as well as future initiatives, with focus on: students; inclusive and innovative higher education; sustainability and overall organization of the student movement. All member union decisions have been outlined by ESU, including the voice of the national student unions which have required assistance with specific challenges they are facing on a national level. The resolution addresses the issues of fundamental values, inclusivity, as well as attempts to resolve the current scenario that students confront on campus. A student manifesto on the future of higher education in Europe has been developed, including a number of ideas to be presented at the "future of Europe" conference that aligns with the work being done in the European higher education sector. ESU has provided feedback on the European strategy for universities, underlining the significance of stakeholder involvement (particularly student participation) in higher education government discourse and decision-making. Finally, as the organization enters its 40th year of operation next year, a brief synopsis of ESU's upcoming events and activities was provided, with members invited to share testimonies.

For more information, please see: *Update from ESU*

#### 11.6. Update from EUA

Michael Gaebel gave an update on the EUA's activities, indicating that EUA's written update, apart from the topics that are to core to the BFUG, comprises also of an overview on EUA's activities on research, which should be of interest with regards to synergies among the different European areas.

With regards to the area of learning and teaching (L&T), it was highlighted that changes in L&T are not accomplished solely by governments or institutions and that collaboration is essential. A presentation of the "LOTUS Project" was given, indicating that it is being carried out by a diverse consortium. Lotus focuses on leadership in learning and teaching, and brings together very different perspectives and approaches from across the EHEA. The project is currently in its second round of a peer learning exercise in which institutions from all around Europe discuss leadership for L&T, in order to develop this area at an institutional level. To link the outcomes to system-level and emphasize the collaboration needed between ministries, institutions, and other stakeholders, a series of policy dialogues is organized. BFUG members were invited to attend a first one on 25-26 [October](#), 2021. In the first half of 2022, additional dialogue events will be hosted by the Finnish, Irish and Austrian consortium partners. Invitations will be sent to the BFUG.

For more information, please see: [EUA: Main initiatives, events and publications in Autumn 2021](#)

### 11.7. Update from EURASHE

Armando Pires presented EURASHE's strategic plan for 2019-2022, covering the strategy's pillars: addressing local needs through regional engagement; innovation and development through user-oriented research; flexible learning for digital society. Further, the strategy framework (2022-2025) and targets were given. The 30th annual conference on Professional Higher Education for Sustainable Development was highlighted, with the 31st annual conference on 'Next Generation PHE', to be held in Brussels. In addition, "Micro-Credentials in Professional Higher Education," "Universities of Applied Science as ERA Regional Hubs," were among the papers mentioned. Mr. Pires thanked the European Commission and EHEA structures that have been involved in EURASHE's efforts thus far.

### 2.8. Update from EUROSTUDENT

Kristina Hauschildt presented an overview of EUROSTUDENT, informing that the student surveys were planned to take place in the spring of 2022, as the questionnaires were being finalized. The topics were mostly related to the students' socio-economic conditions, with an additional focus on the Covid-19 impact in students' lives. She highlighted the involvement of EUROSTUDENT in the BFUG WGs on Social Dimension and Monitoring, by providing support in terms of the indicators for the BPIR (2024). She mentioned the designated BFUG representative to the EUROSTUDENT steering board, to represent the BFUG's perspective. A series of webinars, "EUROSTUDENT talks", aimed at covering monthly topics linked to the social dimension of student life in Europe were highlighted. BFUG members were encouraged to learn more about these webinars by visiting the EUROSTUDENT website and on the meeting documents on the EHEA website.

For more information, please see: [EUROSTUDENT Update](#)

## **12. Information by the incoming Co-Chairs**

Manuel Bouard gave an outline of the upcoming BFUG meeting, which will be held on April 11 – 12 in Strasbourg, stating that France appreciated the TF on Synergies' interest in conducting collaborative events with ERA. The future continuation of the Task Force on enhancing knowledge sharing in the Higher Education Area community was also identified as a topic worth exploring further. Mr. Bouard mentioned that the 11th and 12th of April would be an excellent time to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and that a draft agenda would be distributed following this meeting.

## **13. AOB & Closing of the meeting**

The Council of Europe expressed its appreciation of the fact that France had chosen to hold the next BFUG meeting at Council of Europe Headquarters and it indicated that it had conducted an extensive review of the minutes of previous BFUG meetings in preparing for the discussion on the Belarus Co-Chairmanship, and that this review shows that decisions taken by electronic consultation between BFUG meetings are inadequately recorded. Decision making by electronic consultation is essential, but the decisions made should be recorded in the minutes of the following BFUG, possibly by summarizing these decisions in an appendix to the meeting report. This proposal received broad support through comments in the chat.

Three new members of the German delegation to the BFUG were introduced by Peter Greisler. He went on to say that one of the themes to be discussed at the next BFUG meeting is the sustainability of the process, and that e.g., future BFUG meetings could be held once a year in person and extended by one day. Caroline Hollela (Belgian French community) made a remark to join the CG on Global Policy Dialogue, which would be followed up through written consultation.

The Co-Chairs wrapped up the meeting by thanking the BFUG for their contribution and agile decision-making and concluded the meeting.