



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
AND RESEARCH



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## **PARIS COMMUNIQUÉ DRAFT 0**

**Please note that titles and sub-titles are tentative and will be changed**

### **Preamble/Introduction**

We, Ministers, meeting in Paris on 24 and 25 May 2018, 20 years after the Sorbonne declaration, are proud to recognise that the vision which inspired our predecessors has given rise to the European Higher education area (EHEA) where 48 countries with different political, cultural and academic backgrounds cooperate on the basis of open dialogue shared goals and common commitments.

The Bologna Process has allowed a reciprocal understanding of our HE systems and set the basis for their convergence. Through our cooperation, which has become a point of reference for other regions of the world, we have paved the way for student mobility on a large scale, comparability and transparency of different national higher education systems and increased quality and competitiveness for European higher education.

In the current world situation, higher education has a key role to play, in Europe and beyond. Intolerance, populism and political radicalization have grown to become increasingly serious challenges to democracy. Welfare is unevenly distributed, and unemployment, especially among the young, is high in many countries. Inequality, poverty and destitution are accompanied by polarisation and rising nationalism.

These challenges require joint efforts from all the stakeholders involved. Progress is possible only through international engagement and collaboration. Successful implementation of the fundamental values and agreed principles and measures of the EHEA will put European higher education in a strong position to achieve its goals. Thus, we find the role of the higher education institutions to be of utmost importance and a full awareness of their responsibility is crucial in this process.

It is thus essential that we, Ministers, should renew our original vision and agree on new goals to consolidate the EHEA structure.

### **I. Roles and Objectives of Higher Education**

Higher education in EHEA is characterised by shared fundamental values which are academic freedom, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, as well as the free pursuit of knowledge and freedom of argument. These are essential principles in the face the challenges that society and democracy have to encounter

today. The key elements of our shared values and commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are also essential to fostering high quality education and research. Higher education is an instrument of personal development throughout all ages of life and improves the prospect of employment and thereby full participation in society. It has a key role to play in furthering intercultural understanding, civic engagement, ethical awareness, tolerance and respect of others. It should therefore be equally accessible to all, irrespective of social, economic or cultural background.

We want higher education to promote effective and sustained citizenship in a multicultural and inclusive society. We stress the importance of inclusiveness and reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental values of the EHEA to help and maintain the spirit of democracy.

At the same time, we support enhanced involvement in available EU tools, like Erasmus + in coherence with upcoming Bologna objectives.

Recognising that these values are under pressure, we reaffirm our commitment to the responsibility of public authorities for ensuring that they are a living reality of the EHEA as well as of our respective higher education systems. Keeping in mind the different traditions of the Member States, the picture that emerges from the inquiry into aspects of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation in the "Implementation report" demonstrates the importance of this continued commitment.

At the same time, societal changes require that we explore new aspects of the fundamental values, which go well beyond the legal relationship between public authorities and the academic community. We will further the fundamental values of the EHEA...

## **II. Challenges of the EHEA**

### ***Implementation***

The development of the EHEA in the last twenty years has increased cross-border exchanges and cooperation and enhanced trust and confidence between the operators of our higher education systems. We reaffirm our commitment to paying attention to the shortcomings identified in the "Implementation Report" so as to ensure full and proper implementation of the goals which have been unanimously agreed upon.

To strengthen our national systems, to reinforce and support the quality and exchanges inside the EHEA, we have identified three key commitments:

1. A three-cycle system compatible with the Qualification framework of the EHEA and scaled by ECTS;
2. The compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC); and
3. A quality assurance system in conformity with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

The implementation of these commitments in all our national systems is necessary in order to make the EHEA more efficient.

To improve the implementation of the three key commitments, we adopt the "cyclic procedure" built on peer support as proposed by the BFUG.

We will strengthen our efforts in implementing all the elements of the EHEA in our national systems.

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We recognise that the implementation of all common commitments takes time, and acknowledge that the task might be difficult for new members. We underline the role and responsibility of higher education institutions to reach the goals which have been unanimously agreed upon. On the basis of the conclusions of the report and the recommendations of the BFUG on the Belarus roadmap since this country joined the EHEA in 2015, we undertake to... However, implementation is only measured at national level so far and we now need to move beyond and take into account the reality of cross-border exchanges in education, teaching and research.

We believe that it is therefore necessary to operate transnational programs and stress “interoperability” between the EHEA HE systems in order to foster mobility of students and staff, increase collaboration in teaching and research, developing high quality research and maintaining high level of didactical competences and skills.

### ***Learning and teaching***

We, Ministers, are determined to support the development of new teaching methods and modern approaches to teaching and learning and teaching enhancement. We will promote the integration of the digital revolution into study programs that can help tackle inequality in the access to higher education.

We will promote Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as lifelong learning is today a strategic question in rapidly changing societies. RPL can both help individuals in acquiring new qualifications and migrants in getting their skills recognized at a national level in their new adopted country.

***International cooperation in the field of higher education, including promotion of mobility***  
*Keep and develop the dialogue with other regional organisations. [to be developed]*

### **III. Priorities for the next period & New goals and perspectives for the future EHEA beyond 2020**

We reaffirm that the Fundamental Values are the core of Higher Education systems and their effective implementation has to be a constant goal for Higher Education Institutions. The BFUG has developed reporting on the fundamental values and will continue to monitor progress.

We reaffirm our commitment to these fundamental values of the EHEA as well as to the responsibility of public authorities for ensuring they are a living reality and at the same time we recognise the role and responsibility of higher education institutions to create changes within their organisations. We encourage the higher education institutions to engage in critical self-analysis and strategic value development.

At the same time, societal changes require that we explore new aspects of the fundamental values, which go well beyond the legal relationship between public authorities and the academic community. We will ensure that policy measures are compatible with and further the fundamental values of the EHEA and encourage the contribution of higher education institutions to society.

We encourage the higher education institutions to rethink their strategies and activities in order to respond to the complexities and diversities of society.

### ***Higher education and citizenship***

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Prevention of radicalisation/polarisation and nationalism *[to be developed]*

***Universities create and disseminate high quality research***

Good quality teaching rests on good research; therefore it is necessary to ensure that HE teachers have the time and the means to produce this research.

The principle that all higher education should be research-based, should be reinforced and we reaffirm that the initiation of undergraduates into research is necessary.

We underline that higher education is diverse and teaching becomes as important as research and we recognise the need for both top research institutions and institutions with a local and regional focus.

Synergies between HE and research including, among other things, open education and active citizenship are sought.

***Renewed vision of the EHEA***

3+2 vs flexible study path, harmonization vs standardisation, more attention to study outcomes and less on formal structures. *[to be developed]*

Recognition of prior learning as life-long learning is becoming a key priority and opportunity, assisted by new technologies. *[to be developed]*

***Proposals for 2018-2020***

*[To be developed]*

***The future of the Process after 2020***

We call on the Bologna Follow-up Group to present at our next Ministerial Conference in 2020 in Italy, a proposal on how to take the EHEA further beyond 2020, in particular with a new governance and revised working modes in order to improve effectiveness and ownership by including higher education institutions as stakeholders to a larger extent.

Annexes: tbd