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## BFUG Board Extraordinary Meeting II

Hosted by the Holy See, online  
Monday, 29 April 2024  
08:15 - 09:40 (CEST time)

### Meeting Minutes

### **List of participants**

Country/ Institution	First Name	Last Name
Belgium Flemish Community (BFUG Co-Chair)/ Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair	Liesbeth	Hens
Belgium French Community (BFUG Co-Chair)	Caroline	Hollela
Georgia (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair)	Maia	Shukhoshvili
Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair)/	H.E. Mons. Paul	Tighe
Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair)/ Drafting Committee Co-Chair	Melanie	Rosenbaum
BFUG Vice-Chair/ Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair	Linda	Pustina
European Commission (EC)	Svein	Hullstein
European Commission (EC)	Kinga	Szuly
Council of Europe	Villano	Qiriazi
Council of Europe	Catherine	Dolgova-Dreyer
EURASHE/ WG on Learning and Teaching	Jakub	Grodecki
EURYDICE/ WG on Monitoring Co-Chair	David	Crosier
European Students' Union (ESU)/ Working Group on Social Dimension Co-Chair/ Drafting Committee Co-Chair	Horia	Onita
European University Association (EUA)/ Taskforce on Review of Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA Co-Chair	Michael	Gaebel
European University Association (EUA)	Maria	Kelo
Iceland (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	Una Strand	Viðarsdóttir
Hungary (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	András	Báló
Working Group on Monitoring and Fundamental Values Co-Chair	Tone Flood	Strom
Working Group on Monitoring and Fundamental Values Co-Chair	Mihai Cezar	Haj
Working Group on Social Dimension Co-Chair	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
Working Group on Supporting the Implementation of the Roadmap for San Marino's Accession to EHEA Co-Chair	Maija	Innola
Bologna Implementation Coordination Group Co-Chair	Helga	Posset
Taskforce on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community Co-Chair	Daniela Cristina	Ghitulica
ENQA (Guest)	Anna	Gover
Thematic Peer Group B on Lisbon Recognition Convention Co-Chair (Guest)	Chiara	Finocchietti
UNESCO (Guest)	Vanja	Gutovic
Albanian Ministry of Education (Guest)	Alma	Mile
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Edlira	Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Aida	Myrto

Spain (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair) and WG on Learning and Teaching Co-Chair did not attend the meeting.

The second extraordinary BFUG Board meeting II/2024 was called for by the BFUG Co-Chairs for Monday, 29 April 2024 (from 8.15-9.00 CEST, online via zoom) upon the request by email of BICG Co-Chair, Helga Posset, ESU, Horia Onita, TF RoP Co-Chair, Michael Gaebel, EC, Kinga Szuly, and incoming BFUG Co-Chair Iceland, Una Viðarsdóttir.



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While this did not constitute the necessary quorum of a third of the Board members for such a request, BFUG Co-Chairs agreed with the common interest to verify the state of the EHEA Ministerial Conference programme after the First Extraordinary BFUG Board meeting (I/2024) on 11 April 2024.

The one and only agenda item it was called for was, consequently, "Update on the agenda/programme of the Ministerial Conference of 29-30 May 2024 in Tirana after the 1st Extraordinary BFUG Board meeting 2024". The Board members were asked to register preferably with the liaison person designated at the previous extraordinary Board meeting (as per list linked to its minutes).

A representative of the Albanian Ministry of Education and the liaison persons not currently members of the BFUG Board were invited as guests.

### **1. Update on the agenda/programme of the Ministerial Conference of 29-30 May 2024 in Tirana after the 1st extraordinary BFUG Board meeting 2024**

The Holy See Co-Chair (Mr Paul Tighe) invited the Albanian representative to present the current state of the programme. Ms Alma Mile (Ministry of Education, Albania) conveyed the position of the Albanian authorities, emphasizing the need for effective discussions leading to mutually agreed decisions. She highlighted Albania's cooperative stance, welcoming suggestions from both the Board and the BFUG. Acknowledging the impending Ministerial Conference, she stressed the importance of concluding discussions promptly to facilitate the event organization. She outlined key positions of Albanian authorities, particularly regarding the draft agenda, that underwent multiple reviews and adjustments based on feedback from the Board and BFUG. She emphasized the importance of having at this point only minor, rather than major changes to the agenda, while ensuring alignment with Albania's priorities and expectations for the Ministerial Conference. The Albanian authorities anticipated recognition of its contributions by EHEA member States and emphasized the need for collaborative efforts of the BFUG and member States in the conference preparations. She highlighted the request for concept notes and key questions made to the liaison persons, expressing gratitude for the received feedback and committing to providing timely responses after concluding the internal discussions.

Regarding the thematic topics foreseen in the programme, she shared the Albanian perspective to focus on future challenges of the EHEA, whilst looking at all the achievements, which would be discussed in different parallel sessions. She emphasized the importance of the parallel session related to the Berlin Process and regional priorities in the Western Balkans. During the presentation of Albania's candidacy at the BFUG meeting in 2020, it had been explicitly stated that hosting the Ministerial Conference in Albania would not only highlight national and regional challenges and opportunities within the Bologna Process but also bolster cooperation among Western Balkans economies within the framework of the Berlin Process. This position was reiterated during the presentation of Albania's candidacy at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Rome in 2020. She affirmed Albania's position on maintaining the session as proposed, reflecting the approved candidacy and vision by all EHEA ministers.

Further, with regard to how the proposed content will be developed, she advised that the session moderators include Ministers and heads of delegation having expertise in the topics to be addressed. Also, the importance of adhering to BFUG rules and procedures regarding delegation composition was stressed, to ensure equal treatment for all participating countries.

Upon their preliminary review of the only recently received proposals, the Albanian authorities expressed the need to ensure that discussions, questions, and topics were aligned with the level of policymaking expected at the event. She proposed that this matter should be further discussed with the liaison persons in the next two working days, aiming to maintain a balanced representation of EU and non-EU countries, considering geographic position and involvement during this period. Notably, some topics have not received proposals from the liaison persons, including the thematic session. Therefore, it was important to assess the ability of the liaison persons to discuss and finalize the content, panelists, topics, and questions for each session over the next two days.

Addressing concerns raised by some Board members regarding difficulties in proposing heads of delegations as panelists due to a lack of information about accreditation status of delegations, she conveyed that efforts had been made to

remind countries of the need to register heads of delegations and members, yet part of the head of delegations remained unconfirmed, with most members still unregistered. The Albanian representative urged members to help expediting this process within their ministries and organizations, given the pressing need to finalize the programme and to determine who can take active roles. In light of this, the Albanian authorities suggested to establish a deadline for the submission of head of delegation and member names, ending on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, and May 15<sup>th</sup> would be set as the deadline for practical information such as travel arrangements.

In regards to registrations for the Global Policy Forum (GPF), she informed that there had been only one formal registration received thus far. It was highlighted that for EHEA members, consultative members, and partners, notifications were sent out via diplomatic channels. The BFUG Secretariat had issued a save-the-date notice to BFUG representatives on January 18, 2024. Subsequently, invitation letters from the Albanian Minister of Education, along with detailed information and response forms, were dispatched on March 21, 2024, with a response deadline of April 10, 2024. The registration link was then sent on April 16, 2024. For non-EHEA countries and organizations, invitations were sent by Albanian authorities on March 27 and April 9, 2024. These invitations, including reply forms and deadlines for April 16, 2024, were sent to a list compiled by the CG on GPD, utilizing email addresses sourced from the UNESCO website. To ensure the receipt of invitations by all intended recipients, the CG on GPD was requested to forward the registration link and invitation letters through its subgroups, which was done on April 18, 2024. Feedback was sought from the CG on GPD and its subgroups regarding the distribution of these invitations and the possibility of obtaining a list of addresses. It was noted that the Albanian Ministry had not had prior contacts with the countries and organizations invited to the GPF.

The Holy See Co-Chair expressed gratitude to the Albanian authorities for their efforts in hosting the Ministerial Conference. Emphasizing the importance of facilitating discussions crucial for the continuity of the Bologna Process within the agenda, they suggested sharing the draft agenda on the screen to review existing suggestions by the liaison persons. The Albanian representative noted that additional proposals had been received on Thursday and Friday only. They mentioned that while these proposals might not be included in the current draft agenda, they would be evaluated, and there might be updates to the agenda later on.

EUA noted that despite assertions that the agenda had been agreed upon by the Board, it remained in draft form and required further development. They emphasized that during the recent extraordinary Board meeting in Brussels (I/2024), it was made clear that the agenda needed refinement, and upon review, it appeared that the current agenda fell short of the discussions and agreements reached during that meeting. ESU echoed EUA's sentiments, emphasizing the need for agreements to be reached during this Board meeting rather than through subsequent exchanges. From the perspective of ESU, the notion that the process had been open was challenged, citing instances where input had been provided but not considered or replied to. They stressed that the agenda had not been agreed upon in the BFUG Board, contrary to assertions made. They also noted concerns about the lack of a registration deadline for delegation members and the need for concrete names for speakers. Their request for the current meeting was to discuss and agree on sessions promptly, avoiding a repeat of previous situations where agreements were believed to be reached but the agenda remained unchanged.

The Holy See Co-Chair (Ms. Melanie Rosenbaum) interjected with a point of order, urging the Board, given that the allotted time for the meeting had already almost run out, to conclude discussions on past matters and focus on the agenda at hand. She emphasized the need to review the agenda systematically. Acknowledging that proposals had been made but not yet incorporated, she suggested going through the agenda item by item to assess the current status.

The representative from the Albanian Ministry of Education underlined that due to the recent receipt of suggestions, there hadn't been sufficient time for evaluation. She assured that within two days, all details would be thoroughly examined and communicated. Additionally, she highlighted the challenge posed by the lack of registrations for head of delegations in creating the agenda, hence the proposed deadline to address this issue.

The Holy See Co-Chair (Mr. Paul Tighe) noted the importance of confirming heads of delegation while also stressing the need for a developed agenda. He suggested focusing on the agreed sessions and ensuring that the agenda aligns with both the priorities of the Albanian government and the input from within the Bologna process. Given the limited time



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available, he proposed a quick review of the draft agenda to identify the liaison persons for established sessions and to discuss the arrangements necessary to facilitate the required discussions. He acknowledged the scarcity of time and suggested the possibility of convening another meeting in the near future if needed.

The incoming BFUG Co-Chair Iceland suggested extending the meeting to allow for more discussion. She expressed concern about the lack of an approved agenda, noting that it is not feasible to ask delegations to register without one. She emphasized the need for concept notes and other materials, which she believed should have been prepared much earlier. She expressed growing concern about the uncertainty surrounding the meeting's feasibility.

The Council of Europe (CoE) suggested focusing on fulfilling the responsibilities assigned during the previous extraordinary Board meeting. They reminded the Board of the decision to prepare concept papers and key questions to finalize the agenda. They mentioned that, along with EURASHE, they had already worked on a concept note and key questions for their session. They emphasized the importance of contributions in finalizing the agenda, noting that it should be connected to the recently finalized Communiqué rather than being prepared a year in advance.

The European Commission (EC) expressed concern about the lack of feedback despite multiple rounds of discussions. Regarding the concept notes and panel composition, they requested that any inclusion of the Commission in sessions be discussed with their official representatives in the BFUG beforehand to avoid confusion.

It was suggested to prolong the meeting about 15 minutes beyond the foreseen end at 9.00am, and that those willing to continue could proceed with reviewing the agenda, with the possibility of scheduling another meeting soon. At that point, the Vice-Chair, the BFUG Co-Chair from BEL-Flemish (Liesbeth Hens), and from the Holy See (Paul Tighe) had to leave the meeting for other impending obligations, and the chairing was taken over by the Co-Chair of the Holy See (Melanie Rosenbaum).

The Holy See Co-Chair proposed to delve into the discussion concerning the Plenary Session of the EHEA and its connection to the parallel sessions. She emphasized the existing ambiguity surrounding the thematic topic and its integration into the parallel sessions. The Co-Chair requested input from those serving as liaisons for the thematic topic and/or the parallel sessions, encouraging them to provide constructive proposals.

The BICG Co-Chair expressed difficulty in planning without clarity on the plenary session's content. While the BICG proposal for the session had been sent, uncertainty regarding ministerial involvement as moderators posed challenges. She suggested that the session moderators be Co-Chairs of Working Structures or BFUG delegates, with Ministers providing input. The BICG Co-Chair also highlighted potential difficulties if Working Group (WG) Co-Chairs cannot attend the Tirana Ministerial due to delegation quotas. In response, the Holy See Co-Chair clarified that WG Co-Chairs are representing their countries, and internal delegation decisions must be resolved within each country. The BFUG Co-Chairs do not have influence over delegation composition beyond the agreed-upon five-person formula decided by the Albanian hosts.

The WG on Monitoring Co-Chair highlighted the challenge of not knowing whether their proposal had been considered or how the proposals would be developed further. He also noted the absence of a plenary session focusing on the implementation report, which had been requested during the previous extraordinary Board meeting. The WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair suggested to the Vice-Chair and Albanian authorities that for pragmatic reasons, WG Co-Chairs could serve as moderators for certain parts of the program to expedite the process. Additionally, they urged for a response to WG Co-Chairs who have already submitted proposals for their sessions, as the WG on Social Dimension has already done, at the next meeting. They expressed readiness to organize everything related to the session on the Social Dimension. Furthermore, they voiced support for the proposal made by the BICG Co-Chair regarding WG Co-Chairs who might not be able to join delegations. They suggested a solution whereby the WG Co-Chairs could be invited directly by Albania, emphasizing the need for flexibility in addressing this issue.

ESU highlighted the absence of a session around the Bologna Process Implementation Report which was expected to be included as the EHEA thematic topic. They also mentioned unresolved issues such as consultative member statements. They indicated that if these matters are not addressed, they will be raised at the Ministerial Conference, deeming the situation unacceptable.



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Meanwhile, also the Albanian Ministry representative had had to leave for other obligations, and the Holy See Co-Chair shared her perspective, noting that the Albanian position seems to prioritize only minimal changes to the agenda. They recalled that invitations were sent out with a draft agenda following the March Board meeting's decision, but it appeared that the Albanian side interpreted this as an agreement of the Board with their proposed agenda. They empathized with the reluctance to make fundamental changes, but also with the need for content verification in the proposed topics. They suggested that the EHEA thematic topic on 'Building Bridges' could comprehend starting with the past, such as including the implementation report. They further questioned whether it was feasible to make only slight alterations to the titles that still would better reflect what was desired and expected within them.

The Head of Secretariat intervened to underline the thorough involvement of the Secretariat in managing all correspondence related to the proposals received, highlighting their awareness of the liaison persons, topics, and feedback provided for all sessions. They referenced the Albanian representative's earlier remarks, indicating an understanding to convene discussions directly with liaison persons regarding the topics and feedback, with the expectation that everything would be finalized by May 2<sup>nd</sup>, given the receipt of the last feedback for the topics only on Friday, 26 April.

The CoE reflected on the outcomes of the previous extraordinary Board meeting, recalling a clear decision where individuals were designated for respective sessions. They noted their team's completion of tasks, including engagements with stakeholders like EURASHE and UNESCO for their allocated topics. Emphasizing the importance of clarity in selecting countries to participate in their session, they stressed the need for a balanced representation of both EU and non-EU members. Additionally, they suggested that having knowledge of which countries can contribute to parallel sessions would be beneficial.

The Holy See Co-Chair raised the question of postponing discussions until after Thursday, allowing the Albanian authorities to review all proposals, and asked if anyone needed to adjust their proposals sent to Albania beforehand. They suggested reconvening after the Albanians had reviewed the proposals on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. They sought agreement from the group and invited additional input on the proposal.

The EC expressed reservations about waiting for the Albanian authorities, citing past experiences of limited feedback. They advocated for receiving a consolidated program, as proposed by ESU, potentially incorporating contributions from all parties as soon as possible. They suggested that the Secretariat, provided with all necessary information, could itself propose an annotated agenda for the ministerial without waiting for the Albanian Ministry's input. They emphasized the need to streamline the process and increase efficiency by involving the ministry directly in the discussion, rather than sending proposals and waiting for feedback, which had previously resulted in delays. The Holy See Co-Chair noted the arrival of the Commission's contribution only on Friday afternoon and advised against attributing delays solely to the Albanian authorities. They recommended scheduling another meeting, meanwhile giving time for the Albanian authorities to review all proposals. Additionally, they mentioned that EURASHE and the CoE would complete and submit their proposals by the end of the day, and suggested giving the Albanian authorities two days, until Thursday, 2 May 2024, to consider all input before reconvening.

Regarding the first EHEA plenary session which Board members judged lacking clarity, they proposed assuming that the topics of the parallel sessions remained as proposed and suggested fitting additional discussions under the first thematic topic. They asked if there were contributions for this thematic topic and whether liaisons needed to be appointed. It was noted by the Incoming Co-Chair of Iceland that the WG on Monitoring Co-Chairs had submitted a suggestion that could align with the first EHEA thematic topic. The Holy See Co-Chair requested the Secretariat to circulate this proposal to the Board for review.

Regarding the Albanian perspective, the Holy See Co-Chair noted that there seemed to be an emphasis on ensuring the role of Ministers and urged to respect Albanian policy priorities. However, it seemed that no red lines were mentioned regarding the content to be included. They suggested that if the issue pertained to who moderates, clarity was needed on which delegates have registered. Once the Albanian authorities provided confirmation, sharing a list of ministers could facilitate progress. This would also create pressure for those delegations, who hadn't finalized their delegations,



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to do so. They recommended that the Secretariat contacted the Vice-Chair and Albanian authorities to achieve their sharing the Ministers' list to identify potential speakers. Additionally, they sought clarification on whether there were any fundamental objections to the current topics proposed by the Albanian authorities, as feedback needed to be provided accordingly.

ESU voiced discontent with what they considered a too "Eurocentric" focus of the GPF. They specifically pointed out issues with the sessions regarding the Berlin Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), citing a lack of global inclusivity. They stressed the importance of prioritizing various sub-regional processes in the Berlin Process session and proposed renaming the session on recognition to encompass both global and regional conventions. Furthermore, they expressed concerns about the absence of a session on sustainability and questioned the distinction between mobility and internationalization across plenary and parallel sessions. ESU restated their position that the Berlin Process should not be presented as the primary good practice example, advocating for a more balanced approach. The Holy See Co-Chair acknowledged Albania's consistent advocacy for the inclusion of the Berlin Process across previous meetings and candidacy applications.

ESU reiterated their proposal concerning the EHEA Consultative members' statements, suggesting to reschedule the session to follow the first EHEA thematic plenary. They emphasized the importance of engaging with Ministers to address the matters raised by consultative members prior, as holding the session towards the end will not serve its intended purpose effectively.

UNESCO supported Albania's prioritisation of the Berlin Process session. Regarding the recognition session, together with the CoE, they endorsed the LRC as the anchor, emphasizing its balanced approach and global representation. They highlighted extensive cooperation between regional conventions and full participation from global convention representatives. ENQA stated that they had potential speakers for the GPF's QA parallel session from AAU (Africa) and SEGIB-SIACES already lined up. Both would have tentatively confirmed their participation, contingent upon confirmation of a speaking slot.

Finland suggested to move the fundamental values session to the first day, however the Holy See Co-Chair emphasized that any changes should be made in a manner that would not affect logistics, outlined as a clear concern for Albanian authorities. ESU highlighted the need to discuss the roundtable discussions, emphasizing the necessity to clarify whether concrete topics or general discussions are preferred. They noted that suggestions have already been provided in the document shared by EUA, to which they have also contributed.

The Holy See Co-Chair concluded by announcing that further proposals would be accepted until the afternoon of 29 April. All submissions would be compiled and shared on a shared drive accessible for commenting to the Board members and liaison persons, with the Secretariat circulating the link to the folder. This folder would also be brought to the attention of the Albanian authorities to help with discussions about the first plenary session and the program sequence of the first afternoon. Regarding the GPF, she suggested that it would stand as it is now, despite ESU's critique, as other participants at the Board meeting had shown it would not be so Eurocentric as previously thought. The BFUG Co-Chairs would approach the Albanian side to verify their availabilities and then schedule another (extraordinary) BFUG Board meeting. A new course of action would be decided upon in that upcoming meeting, tentatively scheduled for Thursday afternoon (2 May) or Friday (3 May).

The EC emphasized the need for a consolidated agenda as soon as possible to facilitate internal discussions. They stressed the importance of having input from all parties for a fruitful discussion on Friday. ESU requested a concrete deadline for registrations from the Albanian colleagues to ensure an overview of participants. It was decided to close registration by May 5<sup>th</sup>, midnight, and the Secretariat was asked to share the list of registered participants with the Board.

The BFUG Co-Chairs expressed gratitude to the Board members and participants for their contributions and announced that they would provide updates on the organization of the next Board meeting as soon as possible.



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