

BFUG MEETING XC

11 – 12 April 2024
Hosted by the Kingdom of Belgium

Minutes of meeting

List of participants

| Country/Institution | First Name | Last Name |
|---|-------------|------------------|
| Albania (BFUG Vice-Chair) | Linda | Pustina |
| Albania | Anila | Paparisto |
| Andorra/WG on San Marino Roadmap Co-Chair | Jordi | Llombart |
| Andorra | Mar | Martínez |
| Armenia | Mariana | Sargsyan |
| Austria | Stephan | De Pasqualin |
| Austria/BICG Co-Chair | Helga | Posset |
| Azerbaijan | Vusala | Gurbanova |
| Azerbaijan | Samir | Hamidov |
| Belgium French Community (BFUG Co-Chair) | Caroline | Hollela |
| Belgium French Community | Justyna | Nerkowska |
| Belgium Flemish Community (BFUG Co-Chair) | Liesbeth | Hens |
| Council of Europe | Villano | Qiriazzi |
| Council of Europe | Catherine | Dolgova Dreyer |
| Croatia | Loredana | Maravic |
| Croatia/WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair | Ninoslav | Šćukanec Schmidt |
| Cyprus | Yiannis | Kasoulides |
| Czech Republic | Karolina | Gondkova |
| Czech Republic/TF on RR Co-Chair | Michal | Karpíšek |
| Denmark | Jonas Husum | Johannesen |
| European Commission | Vanessa | Debiais-Sainton |
| European Commission | Svein | Hullstein |
| Education International | Andreas | Keller |
| Education International | Agnes | Roman |
| Estonia | Janne | Pukk |
| ENQA | Anna | Gover |
| ENQA | Douglas | Blackstock |
| EURASHE | Jakub | Grodecki |
| EURASHE | Hannes | Raffaseder |

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| EQAR | Blazhe | Todorovski |
| EQAR | Stéphane | Lauwick |
| European Students' Union (ESU)/WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair | Horia Șerban | Onita |
| European Students' Union (ESU) | Iris | Kimizoglu |
| European Students' Union (ESU) | Tanguy | Guibert |
| European University Association (EUA)/TF on RR Co-Chair | Michael | Gaebel |
| Eurydice/ WG on Monitoring Co-Chair | David | Crosier |
| EUROSTUDENT | Kristina | Hauschildt |
| Finland/WG on San Marino Roadmap Co-Chair | Maija | Innola |
| Finland | Jonna | Korhonen |
| France | Pierre | Laporte |
| France | Mathieu | Musquin |
| Georgia (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair) | Maia | Shukhoshvili |
| Germany | Peter | Greisler |
| Germany | Lea | Kröger |
| Greece | Ioannis | Katsanevakis |
| Greece | Varvara | Papathanasopoulou |
| Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair) | Paul Desmond | Tighe |
| Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair, Drafting Committee Co-Chair) | Melanie | Rosenbaum |
| Hungary (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair) | András | Báló |
| Hungary | Zsolt | Dános |
| Iceland (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair) | Una | Strand Vidarsdottir |
| Ireland | Padraig | Hennigan |
| Italy | Luca | Lantero |
| Italy | Chiara | Finocchietti |
| Italy/CG on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair | Ann Katherine | Isaacs |
| Kazakhstan | Rauza | Mendaliyeva |
| Latvia | Martins | Upmacis |
| Latvia | Inga | Lapina |
| Liechtenstein | Eva | Meirer |
| Lithuania | Andrius | Zalitis |
| Luxembourg | Patricia | Marx |
| Malta | Philip | Vella |
| Malta | Rose Anne | Cuschieri |
| Moldova | Nadejda | Velisco |
| Moldova | Lilia | Parhomenco |

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| The Netherlands | Arthur | Belle |
| The Netherlands | Paul | Persoon Zeer |
| Norway/WG on Monitoring Co-Chair | Tone Flood | Strøm |
| Norway | Ingrid | Skrede |
| Poland | Maria | Boltruszko |
| Romania/WG on Fundamental Values Co-Chair | Mihai Cezar | Hâj |
| Romania/ TF on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in EHEA Co-Chair | Daniela Cristina | Ghițulică |
| San Marino | Remo | Massari |
| Slovakia | Peter | Ondreicka |
| Slovenia | Jernej | Širok |
| Spain (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair) | Roberto | Diaz Sanchez |
| Sweden | Robin | Moberg |
| Switzerland | Aurélia Natascha | Robert-Tissot |
| Türkiye | Aydın | Aslan |
| Türkiye | Serkan | Gül |
| Ukraine | Maryna | Mruga |
| UNESCO | Vanja | Gutovic |
| United Kingdom | Pamela | Wilkinson |
| WG on Learning and Teaching Co-Chair | Tim | Conlon |
| Eurodoc (Observer) | Aleksandra | Lewandowska |
| BFUG Secretariat (Head) | Edlira Adi | Kahani Subashi |
| BFUG Secretariat | Ana | Zhibaj |
| BFUG Secretariat | Manjola | Hasa |

Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Business Europe, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia and United Kingdom (Scotland) did not attend the meeting.

1. Welcome and Introduction

1.1. Welcome by the BFUG Co-Chairs (Belgium and Holy See)

Caroline Hollela (Belgium French Community, Co-Chair) extended warm greetings and expressed hope for productive discussions.

Liesbeth Hens (Belgium Flemish Community, Co-Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and wished for a collaborative and constructive meeting.

Paul Tighe (Holy See, Co-Chair) expressed gratitude to the Belgian hosts for their hospitality and organization of the meeting. He concluded by wishing for a fruitful meeting ahead.



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

Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice-Chair) extended greetings to all participants and conveyed gratitude to Belgium for hosting the meeting. She thanked the Co-Chairs and Secretariat for their collaborative efforts and work throughout the semester, and wished for a productive meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 2.1 Draft Agenda](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 2.2 Draft Annotated Agenda](#)

3. Feedback from the last meetings

3.1. Report from BFUG Meeting LXXXVIII hosted by Belgium, 19 - 20 February 2024

Caroline Hollela (Belgium French Community, Co-Chair) recounted the discussions held at the previous BFUG meeting, serving as a foundation for the current BFUG and hoped that all pending matters be concluded at this meeting.

3.2. Report from BFUG Board Meeting hosted by the Holy See, 12 March 2024

Melanie Rosenbaum (BFUG Co-Chair, Holy See) outlined the discussions from the March Board meeting. At the Board meeting, suggestions were put forth regarding a survey for BFUG members on the future of the Bologna Process, which was afterwards elaborated jointly between current and incoming BFUG Co-Chairs and distributed to the BFUG. She anticipated that the results would be discussed during agenda item 9. Additionally, at the Board meeting was discussion about the next steps for the Communiqué, and regarding the Tirana Ministerial Conference Programme.

4. Update from the BFUG Secretariat

Edlira Subashi (Head of BFUG Secretariat) provided updates since the previous BFUG meeting, that included ongoing collaboration with BFUG Chairs and Incoming BFUG Co-Chairs, as well as support for BFUG Working Structures. She also addressed the list of co-chairing countries for the next work period, informing that if Moldova/Romania are to co-chair and their candidacy is approved, adjustments need to be made. Attempts were made to contact the concerned countries to explore the possibility of swapping positions among themselves. However, no response was received, and Moldova was requested to review the list and consider swapping places. She noted that if any updates will be received, they will be discussed with BFUG Co-Chairs and circulated to the BFUG for electronic consultation. Additionally, she outlined the foreseen and current work plan meetings for each working structure. She also provided details on participation, indicating whether representatives of countries/organizations serving as members for each structure are also BFUG delegates or experts.

Italy raised a query regarding the list of co-chairing countries, mentioning that they had submitted a request to co-chair with San Marino. The Head of Secretariat mentioned that the revised list would soon be presented to the BFUG.

The Holy See Co-Chair emphasized that if Moldova and Romania were approved to host the next work period, Moldova would have to change its co-chairing period, earliest from January to June 2028, as the Vice Chair cannot serve as Co-Chair simultaneously. She underlined the need for consensus on the co-chairing list but noted the reported difficulty in contacting some countries for coordination. While countries were expected to propose a new co-chairing order, some did not respond or attend the meeting. Therefore, the BFUG Co-Chairs sought advice on how to proceed.

A suggestion was raised regarding the procedure for updating the co-chairing list, where in the past countries concerned by the period indicated were asked to indicate their preference for co-chairing in a specific semester. It was proposed to adopt



the same approach. The Vice Chair clarified that the list wouldn't be completely overhauled but that proposals would be welcomed from countries. This proposal could be put forward by BFUG representatives for consideration and discussion in the next BFUG meeting. Azerbaijan expressed its openness to be included in the co-chairing list for the upcoming period. Despite already serving as a co-chair in the current term, their participation was limited to virtual meetings due to COVID-19 restrictions. Azerbaijan is open to host meetings in person.

It was suggested to prioritize discussing item 5, concerning the approval of the next host country, before revisiting the discussion on the co-chairing list.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 4 BFUG Secretariat](#)

5. Host of 2027 EHEA Ministerial Conference and BFUG Secretariat candidacy of Romania/Moldova

Caroline Hollela (Belgium French Community, Co-Chair) referred to the joint presentation given by Romania and Moldova during the preceding BFUG meeting regarding hosting the next period. With no additional questions or remarks raised, the BFUG moved forward to accept this candidacy, to be approved formally at the Tirana Ministerial Conference, extending congratulations to the countries. Romania and Moldova expressed their appreciation to the BFUG for their support and gratitude for hosting the upcoming working period.

The discussion about the next period's co-chairing list continued, with Moldova mentioning their attempt to contact Serbia without receiving a definite response yet. They expressed hope to discuss swapping during this BFUG meeting. The BFUG CoChairs acknowledged this and informed that they would address the matter by reaching out to the countries again.

6. Proposal and programme for the Tirana Ministerial Conference and Bologna Global Policy Forum 2024

Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice Chair) discussed logistical details for the Tirana Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum (GPF), including seating arrangements, venue capacities, and registration details. She outlined the schedule for the BFUG meeting and the Ministerial Conference, with discussions on the Tirana Communiqué and thematic topics. The GPF will follow with roundtable videos and parallel sessions. Bilateral meetings can be scheduled via the conference website, with the social program running from May 30th to June 1st.

Clarification was sought on thematic sessions and parallel sessions, emphasizing the BFUG's role in determining agenda content. Queries were raised about GPF invitations and the placement of the fundamental values topic on the agenda. The role of Working Group Co-Chairs in overseeing parallel sessions was questioned. The Vice Chair noted the Minister of Education's preparation of the detailed agenda and welcomed suggestions for session moderators. She explained the challenge of relocating the fundamental values topic due to the packed agenda and past practices.

ESU questioned the relevance of topics like digital and green skills for education work and responsible AI in research, finding them somewhat distant from BFUG's focus. They sought clarity on the purpose of the roundtable discussion and sequencing of events, finding balanced mobility challenging and questioning the relevance of discussing the Berlin Process with global partners. They emphasized the need for clear session moderators and rapporteurs, along with closer collaboration with Working Groups for coherence.

EUA noted the broad scope of parallel session topics at the Ministerial Conference, finding one topic too narrow and stressing the importance of addressing previously discussed topics. They supported prioritizing fundamental values on the first day and suggested involving international participants in parallel sessions. EUA proposed a revised schedule for the second day, highlighting the international character of GPF parallel sessions and suggesting BFUG and Board involvement in the Ministerial Conference program decision-making process.

Croatia raised a query about the possibility of having six delegates instead of the standard five, particularly if the sixth member serves as a session moderator and also co-chairs a WG.



The WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair suggested changing the title of the parallel session to "Good Practices and Challenges to Implementation of the Social Dimension of Higher Education." They also asked about the role of co-chairs in moderating the session and who to discuss their proposed session structure with, referring to a structure developed during the last meeting in Vienna.

The EC requested clear content for the "building bridges" session and a clear outline and choreography for parallel sessions. It was reiterated that the BFUG decides on the content of the sessions.

EURASHE stressed the importance of positioning consultative member statements earlier in the proceedings, suggesting placing them before the Communiqué to allow for questions, suggestions, and potential ministerial responses. EC requested inclusion of their head of delegation speaking alongside the Minister at the GPF. ENQA highlighted the CG on GPD's role in supporting the GPF, noting discussions on speaker proposals for parallel sessions not yet included in the program. They expressed challenges in moving forward despite support for organizing the global quality assurance session.

Finland emphasized aligning the program closely with future work and previous efforts, preferring in-person discussions over video messages. They sought guidance on intervention limits for ministers and clarity on session selection protocols. Italy asserted the Ministerial Conference's importance for ministerial dialogue, disagreeing with prioritizing consultative members initially. They argued this space should be reserved for ministerial dialogue. Norway emphasized the necessity of aligning the program with the work of the EHEA, and questioned the roles of ministers in sessions, stressing the need to promptly engage relevant ministers for added value. They queried whether delegations would attend parallel sessions together or separately.

The Vice Chair addressed low confirmations for invitations, urging BFUG delegations to prompt ministers for timely responses. She suggested involving the CG on GPD to enhance global participation. Adjustments to the agenda were proposed to accommodate consultative member statements and reformulation of the social dimension topic. Regarding time management during sessions, alternatives to video messages were initially proposed, with flexibility based on BFUG decisions. Inquiries about the background note and rapporteurs were addressed, with plans to send an updated concept note based on discussions.

Switzerland requested any missed information and a participants' list promptly for ministerial preparation. The BICG Co-chair (Austria) proposed volunteers to facilitate sessions at the Ministerial Conference and assigning responsibility to present experts on specific topics to expedite program creation. Iceland expressed interest in having a ministry representative present online with a mandate to make decisions regarding the agenda.

It was decided that an Extraordinary Board Meeting would be organized after the conclusion of the first day of the BFUG meeting, to address the Ministerial Conference program.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 6 MC and GPF Draft Programme](#)

7. Task Force on the Review of Rules of Procedure for the Governance of the EHEA community

Michael Gaebel and Michal Karpisek (TF on RR, Co-Chairs) presented updates and working documents regarding the revision of the Rules of Procedure for the EHEA and the establishment of a Long-term Secretariat. The TF's work during the working period was well received, for the critical interventions see below.

Three documents regarding the Rules of Procedure (RoP) were distributed: a clean version and a track changed version of the draft Rules - to show how comments from various BFUG members were incorporated, and an update document explaining the changes the TF had proposed, and also pointing to some pending decisions, including voting regime. In addition, a list of questions regarding the establishment of a long-term Secretariat was provided, and a text proposal for the Communiqué and an annex with a roadmap for the Secretariat. The TF Co-chairs also referred to their letter of 4 March to BFUG members, inviting them to consult options and approaches within their ministries, in order to prepare the discussion and decision at the BFUG and the Tirana Ministerial Meeting.

7.1. Voting Issues

Concerns were raised about if voting could potentially negatively impact consensus building. The TF recommended to not exempt any issue from voting, as this could provide an easy veto and disable decision making of the BFUG. The TF Co-chairs stated that past practice had rarely involved voting, and no formal exemptions existed. The current RoP emphasized consensus. The proposed RoP would emphasize the requirement of having a two-thirds majority on higher education policy issues in the exceptional case of voting. This would prevent abuse of voting and allow decisions to be made if consensus is unattainable. The mere possibility of voting was expected to encourage compromise and consensus.

Iceland welcomed the proposed modalities of voting, noting it has always been a possibility and it hadn't been abused and expected to be used sensibly. Concerns were raised about veto risks, potentially making the process dysfunctional. The Holy See didn't endorse the document due to unresolved legal issues (especially the status and separation of the document parts) and emphasized that consensus wasn't the same as unanimity. The Holy See opposed a comprehensive voting regime, noting the BFUG's historical ability to manage decisions without it. Austria supported the proposed RoP, advocating consensus as the primary method while allowing for voting if necessary. It was noted that more countries should participate actively at the discussion to avoid decisions by a silent majority and stressed that no issue should be exempt from voting.

ESU raised concerns about a potential "two-tier" Bologna Process if voting was implemented, as abstentions could weaken political commitment and hinder implementation. Without a consensus requirement, countries could abstain rather than agree, leading to less binding commitments and exacerbating the implementation gap. The need to maintain strong political commitments without consensus was emphasized. Italy emphasized higher education as a key area for dialogue, noting few instances of voting in 25 years and calling to strengthen language in Article 5.1 to prioritize consensus. Voting should be a last resort, but there should be no voting on Communiqués to avoid issues at Ministerial Conferences. Germany stressed the importance of consensus, suggesting procedural questions could be decided by majority, while content changes should require consensus to ensure implementation. It highlighted the need for a decision-making culture that respected majority views without unnecessary vetoes. France, Malta, and the EC supported consensus-driven discussions, noting that recent meetings' lack of consensus had led to unresolved issues. EC also urged delegates to enhance the language of consensus in the text, but allow voting as an exception in all cases.

The CoE agreed with differentiating between procedural and content questions for voting. Türkiye emphasized consensus in procedural decisions and specific cases like accepting new members. Hungary also supported consensus and advocated for voting on sensitive issues like member suspensions and additions, and Communiqués.

The Belgium French Community Co-Chair raised questions about the document's structure, particularly the placement of governing bodies and the working language section, and requested a reread after adaptations. Slovenia accepted voting only in exceptional cases. Albania emphasized consensus for decisions on Communiqués, binding policy documents, financing, and EHEA rules. Concerns about the duties of the BFUG and the Secretariat being in the same section were also mentioned.

Italy supported the EC's suggestion to make textual changes, citing phrases from the November 2022 BFUG under the French Presidency to emphasize the importance of consensus. France supported Italy's proposal to allow voting at the BFUG Co-Chairs' discretion in exceptional cases.

Finland congratulated the TF and accepted the proposal, as it would emphasize consensus, but also allow for voting in exceptional cases. Sweden agreed, questioning if there were issues beyond procedure or content. Kazakhstan stressed consensus and opposed any voting exemptions. Norway supported consensus but acknowledged recent departures from it, suggesting voting in extreme cases to prevent a few countries from blocking decisions. Finland, Sweden, and Norway agreed that there should be no exemptions from voting but stressed voting should be rare.

The TF on RR Co-Chair acknowledged the importance of consensus but noted the difficulty in ensuring it, highlighting that culture is not dictated by RoP, but by members themselves. They recalled discussions on voting rules in 2012, emphasizing the need to prevent individuals from vetoing consensus efforts. They proposed potential compromises regarding content, policy, and procedure distinctions and expressed openness to adjusting the two-tier structure based on feedback. They also cautioned against categorically excluding policymaking from voting procedures, stressing the need to consider future challenges. Finally, they committed to addressing all raised issues, showing thorough consideration of perspectives.

The Netherlands stressed the importance of updating procedural rules to maintain effectiveness, suggesting voting in exceptional cases to avoid deadlock while prioritizing consensus. Slovak Republic echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the need for both consensus and the option of voting. Croatia supported consensus as a prevailing principle but noted the necessity of voting in exceptional circumstances. Romania advocated for consensus, proposing exemption of the Communiqué from voting. Denmark agreed on consensus as a guide but accepted voting in extreme cases.

The Holy See Co-Chair raised concerns about document's readiness and time constraints before the Ministerial conference, emphasizing the need for further discussion, especially on procedural rules. ESU highlighted ongoing debates on procedural rules and the importance of consensus, discussing potential implications of stalling progress and the need for effective decision-making mechanisms without compromising consensus. The CoE urged a pragmatic approach, emphasizing consensus decision-making's importance in preventing division and fostering collaboration within the EHEA. The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair stressed the importance of consensus to prevent polarization, recalling the collaborative decision made 25 years ago. While emphasizing consensus-building, they recognized the necessity of voting in exceptional cases. They proposed excluding certain elements, such as the Communiqué and its annexes, from voting to prioritize consensus.

Iceland proposed asking the Co-Chairs of the TF RR to address concerns raised during discussions and to consider Germany's advice on reassessing positions to achieve a satisfactory document for the upcoming Ministerial. The EC strongly supported Iceland and Belgium Flemish Community's proposal of consensus on the new voting regime, where voting on the Communiqué is excluded. Concern was expressed over the consequences of failing to find consensus. It was suggested that there seems to be a consensus to emphasize decision-making by consensus as the main form, with voting as the exception, allowing voting on everything except the Communiqué. Azerbaijan acknowledged the value of consensus but questioned its significance if voting is an option, fearing it might undermine efforts towards consensus.

The Holy See Co-Chair reiterated its commitment to consensus-building and favoured the Italian proposal. However, it raised concerns about other aspects of the RoP, such as voting by proxy and nominations, which were not thoroughly discussed yet. It suggested incorporating consensus-related passages into the Communiqué instead of finalizing a less mature text for the Tirana Ministerial. Despite progress in understanding decision-making processes within the BFUG, there would be still a lack of clarity on addressing unresolved issues in the RoP, and therefore further clarification should be sought on the path forward to achieve an acceptable text.

The TF on RR Co-Chair emphasized that there is no intention to replace consensus with voting, clarifying this stance within the document sections. He stated that the concerns raised by the Holy See would have been addressed before, noting that the entire package had undergone multiple rounds of feedback and response, with detailed explanations provided during the previous BFUG. This was contested by the Holy See, that claimed there had never been a discussion on the content article by article in the BFUG, and that many of the legal and conceptual comments the Holy See had repeatedly made had been repeatedly not addressed.

Albania voiced objection to financial decisions being subject to voting rather than consensus, emphasizing the necessity for consensus in such matters. The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair noted the absence of references to financing within the revised RoP. Holy See highlighted that the original text included a footnote specifying that decisions regarding budget allocation would be addressed in the RoP, following the BFUG's decision to establish a long-term Secretariat and budget. The CoE reiterated the agreement from the prior discussions to differentiate between content and procedure, particularly concerning voting procedures, exempting priorities, Communiqués, standards, guidelines, and binding policy documents from voting. The core of voting procedures, according to the Belgium Flemish Co-Chair, rested on consensus, with Communiqués and Annexes excluded from voting. Türkiye and Azerbaijan asserted that membership issues (admission, suspension, exclusion of members) should be consensus-based rather than subject to voting.

Sweden and Iceland expressed acceptance of the proposed RoP. Italy and Albania accepted the new model while suggesting minor phrasing adjustments (replacing "binding policies" with "instruments and goals"). ESU expressed gratitude to the Co-Chairs and emphasized the significance of binding policy instruments, distinguishing between guidance and political commitments. It was argued that omitting such commitments would create inconsistency, as they are deemed crucial political commitments by member countries. Germany indicated agreement with the current proposal, highlighting that EHEA priorities would be determined by the Communiqué, thus exempt from voting. Iceland reiterated their agreement with the proposal and recommended excluding Albania's addendum.

In conclusion, the BFUG expressed support for the revised proposal, tasking the TF on RR with implementing the discussed changes into the final document version.

7.2. Further discussions regarding the Rules and Procedures

The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair proposed a compromise on the RoP: a new text on voting procedures would be presented the next morning for hopeful acceptance, alongside a proposed compromise with Italy and the Holy See on contentious issues like Board composition and document name. A written procedure was suggested for further discussion and agreement on these points.

The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair requested feedback on other sections of the document. Italy inquired about the submission process for comments, to which the Co-Chair clarified that the session aimed to assess the document's readiness for submission to the Ministerial. Iceland expressed satisfaction with the circulated document, citing extensive discussions and lack of major objections as signs of consensus, signaling readiness to proceed based on majority acceptance. The Holy See Co-Chair stressed the need to address unaddressed concerns thoroughly to ensure consensus and suggested a comprehensive examination of the RoP for effective resolution and promoting open dialogue. The TF on RR Co-Chair expressed concern over unresolved issues and emphasized the need to move forward while acknowledging the challenges of consensus. Italy echoed the importance of considering diverse viewpoints and advocating for an inclusive approach to decision-making, urging against assuming predetermined decisions and advocating for continued dialogue and consideration of alternative viewpoints.

The EC emphasized the urgent need for action. It proposed reinforcing the consensus aspects in Article 5.1 and to exclude the Communiqué from voting. Austria echoed Iceland's intervention, urging collective agreement to sign the document to avoid prolonged discussions, warning of jeopardizing progress to the Tirana Ministerial. The Belgium French Community Co-Chair noted readiness to accept the document proposal, even if some structural suggestions are not included. Italy expressed agreement with the document except Section 5, raising concerns about the Board structure. France stated to have no red line regarding the document but suggested revising wording on the invitations to the GPF in order to keep the responsibility of these in the hands of the host country.

The Holy See Co-Chair agreed on the voting issue solution and raised concerns about several other aspects of the document, particularly exclusion mechanisms and changes in Board composition and roles. They emphasized the need for thorough discussion, suggesting slight modifications if the document is prefaced as provisional, with a clear indication of further revisions to follow. The TF on RR Co-Chair reaffirmed agreement on the voting regime and expressed willingness to discuss Board issues with Italy, seeking clarification on France's contribution. The Holy See Co-Chair underscored declaring the document a policy document, reserving legal issues for future discussion.

Albania stated its previous engagement in discussions on voting procedures and forwarded supplementary comments to the TF, covering Secretariat structure, financing approaches, and Board power balance. Emphasis was placed on thorough discussion and consideration by stakeholders.

A new proposal for the RoP, after overnight-preparation, was presented by the TF on RR Co-chair, reflecting prior discussions. The first amendment clarified the policy status of the document, stating its purpose is to guide the EHEA's operations according to established policies, processes, and practices. The second amendment outlined the responsibilities of Working Structure Co-Chairs, specifying their role as representatives without decision-making power on the Board. The third amendment emphasized consensus as the primary mode of operation within the Bologna Process, with voting limited to exceptional cases, and if no consensus can be achieved by other means. The Communiqué would not be subject to voting.

7.3. Long-term Secretariat Proposal

The TF on RR Co-Chair discussed ongoing deliberations on the Secretariat's future, emphasizing diverse viewpoints expressed in previous discussions. A proposal was presented to encourage Ministerial exploration of its establishment by spring 2026, with outlined key principles and a funding model inspired by EQAR's membership fees. A detailed roadmap aimed to initiate

the Secretariat in 2027, aligning with the next Ministerial Conference to minimize uncertainties. They stressed the importance of including these proposals in the Communiqué, subject to further discussion and agreement.

The need for a decision on endorsing the proposal outlined for the Tirana Communiqué was emphasized, particularly concerning the Secretariat's establishment. Two crucial points were highlighted for future consideration: ensuring full accountability to the BFUG and determining cost-sharing among all members. These issues were presented as pivotal for ongoing discussions and required collaborative engagement.

7.4. Drafting Committee Contribution from the Rules of Procedures

Melanie Rosenbaum (Drafting Committee Co-Chair) discussed suggestions made for the draft Communiqué regarding the RoP contribution. Changes were made for clarity, including rewriting the European aspect and deleting a bullet point.

The TF on RR Co-Chair proposed two options for the inclusion of a long-term Secretariat in the Tirana Communiqué: including clear text indicating the setting up of the Secretariat by 2027 or adopting principles and a roadmap as an annex without a specific timeline. He expressed concern about the potential uncertainties caused by extending discussions until 2033, advocating for a clear timeframe.

ESU appreciated the TF on RR Co-Chairs' work but raised concerns, while supporting the necessity of fundamental arrangements, about seemingly contradictory aspects of the language proposed, especially regarding the "continuing exploration".

ESU fully support the setting up of a long-term Secretariat and suggested a final decision in 2026, aligning with a mandate to establish a Secretariat by 2027.

The Belgium French Co-chair supported the revised text and appreciated the TF's insertion of a go/no go milestone in 2026 for a long-term Secretariat. Iceland suggested mentioning the 2027 Ministerial Conference to provide context for Ministers and expressed support for a Long-term Secretariat. Germany also favored the Long-term Secretariat and noted the welcomed reference to the 2027 Ministerial Conference year.

San Marino opposed the inclusion of a long-term Secretariat in the Communiqué, noting its draft status and the perceived contradiction between bullet points. The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair suggested referencing dates in the annex rather than the Communiqué. The Czech Republic supported this proposal but did not advocate for including the year in the text. The EC thanked the TF and emphasized the Secretariat's role in providing efficient and neutral support. They expressed readiness to co-fund an entity ensuring efficiency and neutrality. Spain agreed with San Marino and Italy's opposition to the long-term Secretariat, suggesting maintaining a rotating Secretariat and addressing it in the next working period.

Kazakhstan opposed the long-term Secretariat, emphasizing the Bologna process as a dialogue requiring mutual cooperation. Italy proposed merging bullet points to highlight neutrality and autonomy of the Secretariat and suggested continuing work on establishing it by spring 2026.

Austria supported the long-term Secretariat, urging countries to make a decision after extensive discussions. The United Kingdom agreed, stating it was a sensible proposal and time to decide. Hungary expressed willingness to explore establishment possibilities but saw no immediate consensus. Finland stressed the need for a reference point or milestone to prevent prolonged discussions without progress. Romania expressed its position in favour of the long-term secretariat and endorsed the proposed roadmap, and supported Austria's position regarding perceived lack of interest to host the Secretariat. In speaking about the effectiveness of the Secretariat, the need to take a look internally was emphasized, to understand the effectiveness of the BFUG itself. Regarding text suggestions, it was suggested to remove the first bullet point, and include "adopt Rules of Procedures", without including the word "document."

Cyprus noted its support for the Long-term Secretariat, echoing the comments from Austria, Germany and Romania, adding that the EQAR model would be a good reference point for financial issues especially, and the inclusion of membership fees would bypass limitations to financing organisations placed abroad, an issue also flagged by Kazakhstan. France, Norway, the

Netherlands, and Slovak Republic expressed their support for establishing the long-term Secretariat. Türkiye similarly supported their support for the Long-term Secretariat, voiced willingness in sharing costs with all members, and expressed interest in hosting the Long-term Secretariat.

Italy underlined the need to find consent on the contribution of the RoP on the Tirana Ministerial, and suggested to add in the text allusion to working on the Long-term Secretariat, keeping the first bullet point as it is, and rewording the text for 2nd and 3rd bullet points. Italy also asked to include in the Minutes the discussion had today, as an important way for future readers to understand all the considerations for decision-making.

Azerbaijan expressed its position in support of the Long-term Secretariat, and advocated a financial structure based on membership fees, and urged the TF to address the legislative obstacles that would need to be addressed, with respect to membership fee issues.

Albania expressed concern that the TF's Secretariat proposal should have been discussed before contributing to the Communiqué. They claimed that the TF had not reached consensus and argued that further exploring options could continue without ministerial mandate. They suggested to annex specifications to include sustainability and conflict of interest provisions. Additionally, they advocated for clarity on staff numbers and financial burdens. The overlap between the roles for Ministers and the Vice-chair's role was highlighted as unclear. Due to insufficient information, Albania opposed the Long-term Secretariat proposal.

Armenia expressed support for the Long-term Secretariat, noting internal financial considerations. Concerns were raised about the term "independent" potentially undermining Secretariat accountability, and questions were posed about its accountability to the BFUG and international staff hiring processes.

Sweden, Malta, and ENQA expressed support for the long-term Secretariat, indicating a willingness to explore unanswered questions. Slovenia showed support, but raised concerns about governance representation in future proposals. Germany sought clarification on the timeline between 2026 and 2027, with reassurance that a detailed model would be presented in Spring 2026 followed by a final decision and establishment in 2027. Germany and the CoE expressed support for the Longterm Secretariat. Italy raised concerns about the stability of the working structure, financial implications, and representation of countries. Albania argued against including the third bullet point proposed in the TF's suggestion for the Tirana Communiqué, stating it was not within its remit to decide future Ministerial matters, advocating instead for clear projections and feasibility studies to avoid potential issues.

In his closing remarks, the TF on RR Co-Chair expressed concerns regarding a potential misalignment between agreed-upon decisions and possible misinterpretations. While consensus existed to commence the new Secretariat structure in 2027, it was noted that there was a perceived lack of clarity, prompting concerns of postponement. It was feared that concrete proposals from the task force might have been sidelined, reintroducing discussions on implementation methods, contrary to initial intentions. Despite the recognition of the need for further discussions on the final model and acknowledgment of associated financial implications, there was a desire to uphold the progress achieved thus far.

The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair thus announced the contribution of the TF for the DC was accepted as retained in the draft Communiqué text.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 7 1 TF RR Update on revision of the RoP](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 7 2 TF RR RoP EHEA Comparision with version of February Brussels BFUG](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 7 3 TF RR RoP EHEA Revised after February Brussels BFUG](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 7 4 TF RR Questions to the BFUG Long term Secretariat](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 7 5 TF RR Draft Annex Communiqué](#); [BFUG BE VA 90 7 6 TF RR Suggestion Communiqué](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 7 7 TF RR Presentation](#)

8. Presentation of the final reports from the Working Groups and Task Forces



8.1 Working Group on Roadmap for San Marino's accession to the EHEA

Jordi Llobart (WG on SMR, Co-Chair) stated that the final WG report was approved in the previous BFUG meeting. He mentioned San Marino's significant progress in approving the National Qualifications Framework decree just before that meeting. Consequently, an online WG meeting was arranged on March 4th, where San Marino presented an in-depth overview of the framework. Subsequent discussions and clarifications led to updates in the final report, particularly in item 3.2. Despite these modifications, the recommendations and conclusions remained unchanged. The Co-Chair expressed contentment with San Marino's adherence to key commitments aligned with recommendations. He highlighted the positive impact of the roadmap supported by the WG on a new member and its alignment with recommendations and conclusions. As the final report had been previously approved in the last BFUG meeting, without changes to recommendations and conclusions, it was deemed approved.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 1 WG SMR Report](#)

8.2 Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)

Helga Posset (BICG, Co-Chair) emphasized the BICG's attempts to showcase the achievements of the three Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) at this semester's BFUG meetings, hindered by time constraints. She voiced the BICG's strong interest in hosting a parallel session at the Ministerial Conference to highlight TPG accomplishments, emphasizing the significance of the key commitments and the progress made. The BICG's report was finalized, with Chapter Two of the Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR) recommended for further insights. The Co-Chair stressed the ongoing importance of BICG work, suggesting countries devise and publish implementation plans, using the BPIR as a guide. She encouraged countries to send delegates with clear mandates to the respective TPGs, whether to offer or seek peer support or both, commending San Marino for participation in all TPGs. She also reminded countries of the vital importance of the key commitments for a functioning EHEA. The Co-Chair thanked the EC for funding the TPGs' umbrella projects for the valuable support they are providing.

Andorra and Azerbaijan acknowledged the contribution and impact of the TPGs, and supported the hosting of a session on the Ministerial Conference on showcasing their work. Additionally, the final report received approval.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 2 BICG Report](#)

8.3 Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process and Bologna Implementation Report

Tone Flood Strom (WG on Monitoring, Co-Chair) provided an update on the draft report, noting that feedback was received by the end of March deadline and final corrections are underway. She mentioned that paper copies of the report, funded by the Commission, will be sent to Tirana for the Ministerial Conference, while the online launch is scheduled for the Conference week. The Co-Chair expressed appreciation for the efforts and feedback provided in reviewing the BPIR.

David Crosier (WG on Monitoring, Co-Chair) provided an overview of the content of the draft report, emphasizing its link to the Communiqué. He started with demographic trends indicating increased student enrollment despite decreased public funding. Regarding fundamental values, he noted that while academic freedom is often defined in legislation, it may not fully encompass all aspects outlined in the EHEA statement. He emphasized the interdependence of fundamental values and the importance of clear definitions for operationalization.

On the key commitments, he highlighted significant differences between countries in cycle models and integrated programs. Recognition showed improvements with more countries implementing Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) principles and automatic recognition advancing. Quality Assurance (QA) also saw progress with more systems covered by EQAR registered agencies.

On the social dimension, variable implementation was observed, with a need for greater strategic commitment to address lifelong learning and social inclusion. The Communiqué reinforced the need for flexible learning paths and highlights the importance of adequate implementation. In terms of learning and teaching, a comprehensive mapping exercise highlighted diverse approaches across systems. While some systems have ongoing strategies to promote learning and teaching, others

lack such initiatives. Nonetheless, various policy measures have been implemented to enhance teaching and learning, including digitalization and pedagogical advancement. Regulatory changes in some countries aim to foster innovation in teaching and learning. However, national policy documents often inadequately addressed student-centered learning, echoing the Communiqué's emphasis on providing students access to high-quality, learner-centered, and innovative education.

The pandemic had significantly disrupted mobility efforts in 2021, with data on recent post-pandemic developments still unavailable. Mobility rates increased with higher education levels, with lower rates observed in short-cycle programs and higher rates in second and third cycles. The Communiqué emphasized the need to reinforce efforts to overcome barriers and facilitate physical mobility. Additionally, the report highlighted the solidarity shown in supporting higher education in Ukraine during challenging times. Various systems had provided aid to academics and students, primarily through financial assistance such as grants. Other measures, including language support, preparatory courses, and guidance and counseling services, had also been established to support Ukrainian higher education, reflecting international solidarity as emphasized in the Communiqué's opening remarks.

Finally, the Co-Chair announced the development of a survey regarding future monitoring options, emphasizing the need for alternative approaches due to limitations in covering an expanding policy agenda in depth. The survey received 25 responses, with option three, combining thematic and comprehensive monitoring in alternation, being the most favored. Comprehensive monitoring was significantly preferred over thematic monitoring. Additionally, proposals from ESU and EUA suggested variations on monitoring key indicators with occasional in-depth exploration of select themes. The survey remains open for further input, with insights indicating a preference for comprehensive data with potential reduction in volume.

ESU emphasized the significant 16% decrease in public spending, highlighting the political weight carried by ministers of education within their governments. They also noted a concerning lack of coherence in study program design, reminiscent of issues observed in 2005, particularly regarding the alignment of study program lengths with their intended purposes. ESU expressed gratitude for highlighting connections with the Communiqué and underscored the importance of ambitious goals for the next cycle. Austria expressed gratitude for highlighting the need to examine the degree structure and the enrollment in long integrated programs within the EHEA. They acknowledged the importance of reevaluating the fundamentals of the EHEA and emphasized the necessity of discussing this matter further in future deliberations.

The WG on Monitoring received congratulations for their work, and the report was approved for presentation at the Ministerial Conference.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 3 WG Monitoring Bologna Process Implementation Report](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 8 3 2 WG Monitoring Presentation](#)

8.4 Working Group on Fundamental Values

Mihai Cezar Haj (WG on FV, Co-Chair) informed that following the presentation of the final report at the previous BFUG meeting, no written comments were received. He explained that the piloting phase of the monitoring framework was taking longer than anticipated, preventing the organization of another WG meeting until this BFUG meeting. The results of the piloting phase, expected to conclude this month, would be shared during an online webinar inviting all BFUG members. Additionally, these findings would be presented at the next BFUG meeting for consideration in finalizing the monitoring framework for the upcoming mandate. The WG Co-Chair concluded that the work for this mandate was complete, with the report being already presented during the previous BFUG meeting.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 4 1 WG FV Report](#); [BFUG BE VA 90 8 4 2 WG FV Annex](#)

8.5 Working Group on Social Dimension

Horia Onita (WG on SD, Co-Chair) announced the finalization of the report and informed on the last WG meeting in Vienna where the group concluded its activities. He emphasized the significance of the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) established to strengthen the social dimension, adopted as an annex to the Rome Communiqué. These principles continued to hold importance

in the draft Communiqué's section on inclusive EHEA, aligning with the overarching priorities for 2030. Building upon the foundation laid by the PAGs, the WG had proceeded to develop indicators and descriptors to support the monitoring system. These tools served to measure progress and aid in implementation within a broad framework. Recognizing the diversity of approaches among countries, the Co-Chair stressed the importance of adopting a toolbox approach to accommodate various methods for implementing the principles. Through this approach, a comprehensive framework for the social dimension was established, enabling monitoring at both European and national levels and facilitating progress evaluation. He concluded that this coherent system encouraged countries to advance their efforts in promoting the social dimension through a convergent method.

Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (WG on SD, Co-Chair) updated on the comprehensive consultation held over the past three years with BFUG members, consultative members, and specific countries. He noted a total of 12 cycles of consultation and 20 iterations of the key document on Indicators and Descriptors. The document was adopted at the last BFUG meeting in Brussels and will be included in the set of adopted documents for the Tirana Ministerial Conference. With 15 organized meetings and engaged group membership, the WG's resources are available on the EHEA webpage, showcasing their extensive work. The Co-Chair concluded by affirming that the achievements of the WG reflect a collaborative, innovative, and strategic approach toward fostering a more inclusive and equitable higher education landscape, facilitating continued progress in the upcoming period.

The WG received congratulations for their work, and the final report was approved.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 5 1 WG SD Report](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 8 5 2 WG SD Indicators and Descriptors](#) [BFUG BE VA 90 5 3 WG SD Presentation](#)

8.6 Working Group on Learning & Teaching

Tim Conlon (WG on L&T, Co-Chair) presented the final report, which was developed with reference to the Rome Communiqué to support higher education institutions (HEIs) and advance student-centered teaching and learning. It emphasized increased support for all learners, including teaching and non-teaching staff, with a focus on stable employment, career opportunities, and access to staff development. The report highlighted the importance of flexible learning paths, micro-credentials, and the use of digital technologies for learning, teaching, and assessment, especially considering the impact of the pandemic on education delivery. The report addressed student well-being, acknowledging the rising cost of living and socio-economic challenges affecting mental health. It also emphasized the need for staff development to meet the evolving needs of diverse learners and recommended establishing a TPG on student-centered learning. Additionally, the report proposed incorporating pedagogical training into doctoral programs and providing accessible continuous professional development for all staff to adapt to changes in higher education. The Co-Chair highlighted transformative approaches to teaching and learning, emphasizing the remarkable resilience displayed by HEIs during the pandemic. This period provided an opportunity to enhance the student experience, foster learner autonomy, and integrate innovative pedagogical practices. The report recommended further exploration of technological advancements and transformative teaching methods to better prepare students for the workforce and embrace new forms of mobility. It advocated for respecting the diversity of learners and addressing individual and societal challenges. The Co-Chair expressed gratitude to the WG members for their support and contributions. The final report received the approval of the BFUG.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 6 1 WG LT Report](#); [BFUG BE VA 90 8 6 2 WG LT Presentation](#)

8.7 Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue

Ann Katherine Isaacs (CG on GPD, Co-Chair) noted that the pre-final report had been previously submitted and was now resubmitted with some minor refinements. However, key elements such as the Global Policy Statement and the program of the GPF were yet to be finalized. While the Global Policy Statement saw little change since the previous submission due to limited feedback, the GPF content required further development. The CG had engaged in significant discussions and established valuable connections with organizations and countries worldwide, signaling an important achievement that should be continued and strengthened. It was emphasized that the global policy dialogue should not solely rely on the CG but should involve other working structures as well. Collaborations with various entities, including the WG on SD and TPG B and C, had been fruitful, and efforts were underway to finalize the forum's program with inputs from diverse stakeholders. Recommendations for the

future included the continued outreach of the CG to foster relationships beyond the EHEA and the proposal of the forum to the BFUG, along with the formulation of a statement on global policy dialogue.

The Holy See Co-Chair noted that, historically, the report had been adopted alongside the draft Statement which was regularly included in its annex. Subsequently, the report was adopted by the BFUG, including the draft statement, and the CG was congratulated for their work.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 7 1 CG GPD Report](#); [BFUG BE VA 90 8 7 2 CG GPD Presentation](#)

8.8 Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community

Daniela Cristina Ghitulica (TF on EKS, Co-Chair) provided an overview of the report, encompassing the TF's activities and a report on the implementation of the action plan, along with several attached annexes containing the tools developed during the period. Additionally, she mentioned the Recommendations document, clarifying that revisions were made to emphasize that they are not mandatory but rather a collection of suggested actions, leaving it to each country to decide what is relevant and feasible for implementation at the national level. Furthermore, the TF Co-Chair addressed the issue of the newsletter guideline presented in the previous BFUG meeting. She noted that no objections were received and feedback from ESU was incorporated into the document. However, it was raised during the Board meeting that mere lack of objections might not suffice to assume agreement. Therefore, she sought confirmation from the BFUG regarding the newsletter's continuation and emphasized the need for contributions to ensure its quality as an official document of the EHEA. Additionally, she reiterated the TF's request to organize an activity at the Ministerial Conference, involving interviews with participants to document the conference and produce videos. However, she stressed the necessity of participation from BFUG members or their delegations to make this activity possible, requesting their cooperation in encouraging participation from their respective delegations.

Iceland suggested that, regarding the newsletter, a mechanism should be established for BFUG approval of its content before publication to ensure transparency and enable member reactions if necessary. Secondly, they expressed concerns about the extensive recommendations, particularly regarding the implementation plan, fearing potential confusion or overload due to overlap with the BICG's implementation plan. They proposed phrasing it similar to the social dimension toolbox approach for clarity. In response, the TF Co-Chair clarified that responsibility for newsletter approval falls under the preview of BFUG CoChairs. However, she remained open to alternative suggestions. She also noted that the implementation plan was the same as the one of the BICG, but aimed to also include activities related to knowledge sharing.

The TF Co-Chair emphasized the need to issue a call promptly if there was a genuine desire to produce a newsletter for the year, aiming for at least two editions annually. She suggested that although it might be too late to release one before the Ministerial, they could issue the call and incorporate information from the event afterwards. She noted that while there seemed to be no opposition to the newsletter, a commitment from the BFUG to contribute at least once a year offering relevant content such as projects or events was needed. In response, the Holy See Co-Chair reflected on the challenge of moving from passive acceptance to active participation, suggesting that the true measure of endorsement for the newsletter would be in the contributions received. They proposed a more organic approach, allowing the initiative to evolve naturally rather than formalizing commitments. Regarding the report, they recommended adopting it along with the recommendations understanding it as broad suggestions for best practices and possibilities for countries. Expressing gratitude for the TF's efforts, the report was accordingly adopted.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 8 8 1 TF EKS Report](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 8 8 2 TF EKS Recommendations](#)

9. Conclusions from the current work plan and repercussions of the reports on the future workplan and BFUG structures - discussion of priorities and further steps, continued from BFUG meeting LXXXVIII

Belgium French Community Co-Chair outlined the session's objective of continuing discussions from the previous BFUG to generate ideas for shaping the future work program. Emphasizing that the aim was discussion rather than decision-making, she highlighted a joint initiative between the current and incoming BFUG Co-Chairs to facilitate the transition from the current

work plan to the next one through a consultation process. Expressing gratitude for the inputs received, she explained that the BFUG was asked to focus on up to three main priorities using an outcome-oriented approach.

The Holy See Co-Chair recalled discussions from the previous BFUG meeting, where participants deliberated on the main topics for focus for the next working period, emphasizing the need for a supporting substructure to avoid overloading the process. She mentioned that the survey sent out to BFUG members received 23 responses, that were grouped into three main areas: structural and governance considerations, content-related topics, and the development of Bologna Process tools and instruments. The aim was to determine which areas the BFUG should prioritize to add value, focusing on how to work and with which tools. Mobility emerged as the top priority, intertwined with internationalization, transnational education, and other key commitments. Other mentioned topics included learning and teaching, fundamental values, social dimension, AI, knowledge sharing, data, green transition, and global policy coordination. Regarding tools, there was frequent mention of implementation and monitoring, along with micro-credentials, Qualifications Frameworks, ECTS, and joint degrees. The Holy See Co-Chair concluded by posing the question of how and when to proceed with developing the work plan for 2024 to 2027 and the vision for 2030.

Iceland suggested sharing a Word document summarizing the discussion for further consideration. They emphasized the importance of gathering input before assuming the co-chairmanship with Hungary, intending to delve deeper into the topics during the upcoming Board meeting. Key areas of interest identified were mobility and the vision for the EHEA's future, with various topics falling under these themes. They underscored the significance of tools as mechanisms for advancing issues, such as QA supporting mobility. Due to time constraints, Iceland proposed distributing the document via email through the Secretariat for review, with the possibility of revisiting the discussion later if time permits.

Croatia recommended considering recommendations from various working structures' reports, noting that some have provided insights into how the future of the BFUG should evolve, specifically mentioning the recommendations from the WG on SD, which explored multiple scenarios and offered suggestions for the future.

ESU expressed surprise at the emphasis on governance within the thematic areas, highlighting their expectation for more policy-related topics. They acknowledged the significance of mobility and stressed its link within the envisioned future. ESU emphasized the importance of addressing concrete elements that impacted the community while discussing future proposals. They suggested focusing on achieving an inclusive, innovative, and interconnected EHEA and proposed mapping out how the work aligns with these priorities as a basis for discussion, echoing the overarching political priorities agreed upon by ministers for 2030.

The EC acknowledged the thorough analysis conducted but expressed concern about the limited time available for discussion. They recommended moving forward with the draft Communiqué to ensure timely progress.

The Belgium French Community Co-Chair recalled Iceland's proposal to provide feedback before the next Board meeting. They suggested sharing both the PowerPoint and Word documents with all participants to allow for comments and proposed setting an appropriate deadline for feedback.

10. Draft for the 2024 Tirana Ministerial Communiqué

Melanie Rosenbaum (Drafting Committee, Co-Chair) presented the draft 2.1 of the Communiqué. Emphasizing the need to conclude the commenting phase, she outlined the approach of reviewing each comment and seeking agreement or disagreement from the BFUG, without intending to reopen paragraphs or consider further comments.

10.1. Introduction

In the first paragraph, the decision was made to modify the sentence in line 4 to read, "*Four years later*, we meet here in Tirana to assess the progress made and decide on the next steps to fully achieve its *vision* by 2030." Additionally, it was agreed to adjust the final sentence of the first paragraph to incorporate 'participation of all members and relevant stakeholders,' instead of solely 'all relevant stakeholders.'

Sweden proposed the use of the term 'members' instead of 'countries' throughout the text.

In the second paragraph, there was a suggestion to retain the mention of the role of higher education in addressing polarization. Additionally, it was decided to maintain the term 'geopolitical' instead of 'political', in the sentence at line 8. Due to feedback regarding lengthy sentences, it was suggested that the Drafting Committee revise this section to enhance readability.

A suggestion was put forward to modify the term 'contributing' in line 10 to 'addressing,' resulting in the sentence, 'Higher education as a public good and a transformative power for society plays an irreplaceable role in *addressing* those challenges and promoting democratic societies.'

The sentence in line 11 was modified as 'Higher education institutions should be *safe* spaces of open-mindedness and diversity, and they should seek to promote, through *learning*, teaching and research activities, critical mindsets, tolerance, non-violence, science-based dialogue, and the peaceful exchange of different perspectives.'

In the last paragraph, it was suggested to rephrase the first sentence as 'Particularly, within our region, the *armed attack against* Ukraine by the Russian Federation *supported by* Belarus in violation of international law has brought about the need for international support for Ukrainian higher education and has proven the importance of continually maintaining and defending the values of the EHEA.' In the subsequent sentence, it was decided to include as follows 'We stand strongly with Ukraine and *its higher education community* and decide to maintain the suspension of the rights of participation of the Russian Federation and Belarus *in all structures and activities of the EHEA.*'

10.2. Fundamental Values

It was decided that the definitions of all fundamental values should be kept as part of the Tirana Communiqué. There was a discussion on whether the term technical in the monitoring framework of the values should be eliminated, but it was decided to remain, as it has been used in previous Communiqués, for consistency.

10.3. Key Commitments

In discussing the introduction of Key Commitments in the Communiqué, it was clarified that although these commitments were formally established in 2018 in Paris they were based on longstanding principles from before this date. Their significant designation as preconditions in 2018 was of primary focus, however, for the Tirana Communiqué, it was decided that it will reaffirm these commitments as preconditions, as originally framed in Paris, in order to accurately reference the history of their establishment.

It was highlighted that the section on the overarching framework of qualifications, first and second cycle degrees based on learning outcomes and the ECTS must be specified, otherwise it would be implied that this applies universally to all degrees. It was argued that it was sufficiently clear that the first and second cycles are measured by ECTS, whereas the third cycle is not.

It was argued that the scope of the LRC should not be reduced to automatic recognition. It was also argued that the link between the LRC and automatic recognition is never made adequately clear and should be clarified and emphasized to support mobility across Bologna countries, which is of utmost importance.

The discussion centered on recommending changes to the ECTS guide. Some felt that "revise" could intimidate universities and suggested being more specific about why the revision is needed. "Adapt to current developments" was favored by some, while others argued "revise" is standard but should be clarified to avoid a full overhaul. Ultimately, "review" would replace "revise," and "adapt to current developments" would be included.

It was argued that a clear reference to micro-credentials might be suitable. It was noted that the focus was on ECTS, not merely workload but also on the obligation of ensuring that higher education institutions prioritize learning outcomes in their

programs, particularly in relation to micro credentials. It was debated whether the ECTS should be revised or updated to current developments. Further, it was argued that the recommendation simply state that a revision and adoption of the ESGs is proposed by 2026, but do not specify who will draft it. It was argued that it is too reductive to ask ministers about the drafters of any document and not coherent with the rest of the Communiqué where actors have not been specified. It was strongly debated that ministers have specified the actors in such cases, specifically the E4, and it reflects a model of partnership and trust that has been employed in quality assurance for decades. It was proposed to have the BFUG "invite the authors". It was emphasized that a fundamental principle of the Bologna Process was that the development and ongoing refinement of the ESG should be led by consultative members representing the higher education community, rather than by governments or ministers. It was further argued that the involvement of the BFUG was implied but that the ministers should task the authors, the E4, as they have always done in the past. It was recommended that it should be made clear in the text that any revision should first be presented at the BFUG. Ultimately, it was decided to propose to the BFUG that they receive "a revised version of the ESG by 2026".

During the meeting, there was a discussion about the BFUG's proposal to present key commitments for debate, in the conclusion of the text. The main points of contention were whether to limit the number to three, or to consider additional key commitments, and the potential contradiction in concluding the text with these commitments, given that the entire text is predicated on the current key commitments. It was clarified that this simply referred to the fact that the Bologna tools, which included but were not limited the key commitments, had evolved over time, prompting a call to review and further their development and expansion. It was decided to add this in the beginning of the document.

10.4. An Inclusive EHEA

On the Social Dimension section, there was a suggestion to refrain from specifying any social and economic challenges that impact the mental health of students but keep the general term and, moreover, to not only focus on mental health. It was decided to keep the rising cost of living and student housing as two of the challenges.

To accommodate Hungary's and the Republic of Turkey's definition of gender equality as „equality between women and men“, a footnote was proposed in the Communiqué. Most members opposed this, except Azerbaijan who supported Hungary and Turkey, arguing that gender was a social construct related to self-identification, not the biological sex at birth. Several BFUG members stated that the interpretation supported by Hungary, Turkey, and Azerbaijan conflicted with the established definition of gender equality agreed upon by all member states in the CoE. It was also noted that introducing footnotes for varying national interpretations risked disrupting the consensus-driven atmosphere historically maintained in BFUG Communiqués. The suggestion was made to record these differing views in the meeting minutes instead.

10.5. An Innovative EHEA

A few comments highlighted the importance of sustainable funding in achieving the mission of higher education and it was suggested that when discussing initiatives like micro credentials, joint programs, or innovation, the scope of the paragraph should be broadened.

A sentence that highlighted the need for synergies between the EHEA and the ERA was included in the text as many members agreed this needed to be explicitly stated. France argued that there were issues of lacking synergies also between working structures and ERA's structures, and that this sentence should reflect this. It was suggested that it should be taken into account in the minutes.

Regarding lifelong learning, EURASHE and Germany insisted that a statement be made that there be training of innovative specialists to address this, but there was no support from other countries.

Despite long-standing commitments since 2007, student-centered learning was often not reflected in legislation or national policies, leading to suggestions for more concrete elements by the WG on L&T. However, BFUG feedback favoured a more generalized approach, resulting in a directive to support the implementation of student-centered learning without specifying actions. While some members preferred to remove specific mentions to maintain consistency across multiple areas needing



attention, others argued that failing to specify actions contradicted the expressed commitment to student-centered learning. Ultimately, no consensus was reached on including specific actions or structures in the Communiqué.

Regarding AI, many members noted its narrowly focused treatment in the Communiqué and suggested a broader exploration of its reality and impact on higher education and potential BFUG responses. It was also recognized that countries may not be ready to commit to supporting specific policies in this sector, leading to larger adjustments in the wording of the Communiqué to better reflect this stance.

10.6. An Interconnected EHEA

On having the BFUG review the benchmark of mobile students, it was outlined by the EC that the proposal came from the current context of the EHEA and current initiatives where the current benchmarks are 20-23%. It was recommended that the BFUG reflected this by updating it to „at least“ 20%, which also reflected the 23% benchmarks of several countries. There was some disagreement on stating that the BFUG would review this benchmark by 2027 on the Communiqué. Mobility should not be restricted to the EHEA. The EC reminded members about the supporting instruments to facilitate mobility and meet targets, including the European Student Card Initiative, that had been highlighted in the last two Communiqués and argued that, given the current ongoing goals to reinforce these targets and recommend further actions to achieve them, omitting these elements from this Communiqué appeared unfounded.

The EC voiced concerns that the current Communiqué's softer language could appear as a step back to the higher education community compared to previous ones. It highlighted the new European degree initiative, which aimed to remove barriers in joint programs and inspire all Bologna countries without requiring immediate commitments. As such, the Communiqué should reflect this, emphasizing the potential of the European degree and the aim for fruitful discussions and synergies with the EHEA—a change that was widely supported for bringing new energy and ambition to the Communiqué.

The DC Co-Chair informed that the DC would work on cleaning up the Communiqué according to these revisions received in the meeting, and would send the finalised version to the BFUG.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 10 Draft 2.1 Tirana Communiqué](#)

11. Draft for the 2024 Bologna Global Policy Forum Statement

Ann Katherine Isaacs (CG on GPD, Co-Chair) presented the draft 6.x statement and recommended that the drafting subgroup of the CG promptly review the changes proposed by EUA within the upcoming days and distribute the revised version. She encouraged any comments or interventions on the current statement to be voiced during the meeting or directed to the CG for consideration.

The Holy See Co-Chair acknowledged that the feedback from EUA focused mainly on wording rather than substantive changes, indicating minimal input from the audience since the draft was shared. It was suggested to proceed with integrating the suggested wording adjustments and circulating the updated version. Following this, members extended congratulations for the work achieved.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 11 Draft Global Policy Forum Statement](#)

12. Update from the Consultative Members

The updates provided by the consultative members had been submitted in writing and made available on the EHEA website, resulting in their acceptance.

12.1. Council of Europe





For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 1 1 CoE Report](#)
[BFUG BE VA 90 12 1 2 CoE Presentation](#)

12.2. Education International/ETUCE

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 2 EI ETUCE Report](#)

12.3. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 3 ENQA Report](#)

12.4. European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 12 4 EQAR Report](#)

12.5. European Students' Union

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 5 ESU Report](#)

12.6. European University Association

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 6 EUA Report](#)

12.7. EURASHE

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 7 EURASHE Report](#)

12.8. UNESCO

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 90 12 8 UNESCO Report](#)

13. Information by the Incoming Co-Chairs (Hungary and Iceland)

13.1 BFUG Board Meeting XCII (Iceland)

Una Strand Vidarsdottir (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair, Iceland) announced that the BFUG Board meeting was scheduled for September 3 in Reykjavik, with the precise location yet to be confirmed. She emphasized that all essential details, including links to airlines and available travel connections, were readily accessible on the website.

For more information, please see: [BFUG BE VA 13 1 BFUG Board Meeting XCII Presentation](#)

13.2 BFUG Meetings XCIII (Hungary)

András Báló (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair, Hungary) conveyed that the BFUG meeting was scheduled for September 26-27 in Budapest, and additional information would be provided at a later time.

16. AOB

Austria communicated that an invitation for the European Network of Recognition of Prior Learning would be sent via the Secretariat. All necessary information could be found in the presentation, including contact details.



Albanian BFUG Secretariat
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For more information, please see: [*BFUG BE VA 90 European RPL Network*](#)

The Belgian French Community Co-Chair reported that a video on the Bologna Process was presented at the last BFUG meeting, and now a factsheet was accessible.

For more information, please see: [*BFUG BE VA 90 Bologna Process Factsheet*](#)

EUROSTUDENT announced that the invitation to participate in their conference online was dispatched through the Secretariat. They encouraged interested parties to consider joining, emphasizing the importance of investigating the social dimension of students in their respective countries.

No other business was brought forward, thus the meeting was successfully concluded with thanks to the BFUG Chairs and members for their contribution and support.



Albanian **BFUG** Secretariat
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