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Background note on Eurodoc's application for consultative membership

Prepared by the EHEA Secretariat for the XCII BFUG Board meeting in Reykjavik, 3rd of September 2024

I. Information about the application

On the 9th of April 2024, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (hereinafter referred to as 'Eurodoc') sent an email to the EHEA Secretariat with the request to change their membership status from EHEA partner to consultative member. The request has included as attachments two documents: a formal application letter (**'Eurodoc application to the Bologna Follow-Up Group as consultative members'**), which relates to the way EURODOC argues the fulfilment of the consultative membership criteria, and **the Eurodoc Statutes** in English.

The co-chairs at the time of the receipt of the application, Belgium and Holy See, have informed Eurodoc that the request would be dealt with by the (then) future co-chairs, Hungary and Iceland. This has been justified on the proximity of the Ministerial Conference in Tirana and that no (regular) BFUG Board meeting would be organised between their application and the Ministerial Conference, thus limiting the possibility to thoroughly analyse the application.

Proposed action: The application from Eurodoc is put on the agenda of the BFUG Board meeting XCII in Iceland, with the proposed action to advise the BFUG on the decision to be made in relation to their application.

II. Criteria for consultative membership

According to the [Rules of Procedure of the European Higher Education Area](#) ('RoP-EHEA'), as adopted by the ministers of higher education as Annex II of the Tirana Communiqué, *'European level representative organisations with a legitimate interest in and commitment to, higher education, and intergovernmental organisations representative of public authorities with competence in higher education policy at European level, are eligible for consultative membership of the EHEA.'* (Article II.2)

The exclusive competence for **accepting** new members and consultative members lies with the Ministerial Conference, based on the proposal from the BFUG, which will examine the application in accordance with its own Rules of Procedure (Article III.1 of RoP-EHEA). *Per a contrario*, a decision of the BFUG to reject the application closes the procedure, without the requirement to raise the issue at the Ministerial Conference.

The admission of consultative members is part of the exceptional voting regime where, *'in exceptional circumstances and in spite of the best efforts of the BFUG Co-Chairs, no consensus can be achieved, decisions can be taken by vote'*, in this case with a two thirds majority (Article V.3

of RoP-EHEA). If required, this majority applies for both BFUG and, if the case, Ministerial Conference.

The **four cumulative criteria** for consultative membership are stipulated in Annex 4 of the RoP-EHEA: **added value to the Bologna Process, Relevance of the stakeholder group,**

Representativeness and Organisational Form. The Annex details how each of the criteria should be interpreted to assess compliance.

III. Information regarding previous requests of EURODOC to obtain consultative membership

At the [62nd BFUG Board meeting in Zürich](#), on the 3rd of July 2018, the French Secretariat informed the BFUG Board about the application of EURODOC to change its' membership status from EHEA partner to consultative member. The Board decided to ask EURODOC further information about their application, especially *'better explaining its motivation'*.

At the [63rd BFUG meeting in Vienna](#), on the 27th-28th of September 2018, the BFUG decided to *'ask for more concrete information about the relevance of their contribution to the work of the BFUG and the real added value of their change in membership status'*.

At the [64th BFUG Board meeting in Skopje](#), on the 12th of February 2019, the BFUG Board was informed about a discussion between ESU and EURODOC on the issue of double representation: *'In case consultative membership for EURODOC is accorded, ESU will represent and discuss issues considering students between level 4 to 8 of the EQF, while EURODOC will represent PhD students from the professional side, as well as young researchers and teaching PhD students'*.

As the matter had been pending, on 30th of March 2020, Eurodoc sent [a letter](#) to the BFUG Secretariat, to the attention of the BFUG, with the intention of *'reviving the request to the members of the BFUG to change the current status of Eurodoc from partner to consultative member'*.

At the [70th BFUG Board meeting](#) (online) hosted by Ukraine, on the 2nd of April 2020, the BFUG Board decided that *'the clear recommendation from the Board to the BFUG would be to not admit Eurodoc as Consultative member'*. This has been justified through the following: *'The Board members commented that Eurodoc can be invited to BFUG meetings as experts on specific topics, and that they are already represented either by ETUCE or ESU. The BFUG needs to be selective as the core of the EHEA are the members and the Consultative members should not become too many'*.

The BFUG Board decided that *'The BFUG Co-chairs will send this recommendation to the BFUG via electronic consultation'*, which finished the procedure with Eurodoc retaining their status as EHEA Partners.