

# Task Force on the Review of the Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the European Higher Education Area (TF RR)

## Report to the BFUG, proposals for further work

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### A. Introduction

This document provides a report on the work of the Task Force on the Review of the Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the European Higher Education Area (“TF RR”) in the working period 2021 – 2024. It also includes proposals for further steps towards the Long-term Secretariat, in follow-up of the Tirana Ministerial Communiqué (May 2024).

The document comprises:

- The actual report on the TF's approach, its activities and outcomes
- A list of documents that it provided to the BFUG
- Proposals and recommendations for the continuation of the work for the establishment of a Long-term Secretariat during the working period 2024–2027, including draft Terms of Reference for a dedicated Working Group

### B. Task Force's terms of reference, and its approach

The TF RR was established at the BFUG in Brno, 7-8 October 2022, to “develop a proposed set of rules and regulations for the governance of the European Higher Education Area (“EHEA”) and its bodies, in particular the BFUG, the BFUG Board and the Secretariat, working groups and similar for its final adoption by the BFUG before the Ministerial conference in 2024 including any necessary text to be reflected in the ministers' communiqué”. The terms of Reference (ToRs) invited the TF also to “propose



recommendations on any reforms of EHEA structures in line with needs identified within the work on updated rules of procedures". (see Annex 3 for the TOR).

Therefore, the TF, from the very beginning, saw its task in the revision of the Rules of Procedure, but also in a more general consideration of the governance and working structures of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on clear principles and values.

It organised its work in two parallel, but interrelated strands:

1. The revision of the existing Rules of Procedure that had been developed over the years, and as a consequence were not fully consistent and well-structured regarding their content and wording .

The Task Force considered among others:

- organisational structures, including the BFUG (Bologna Follow-Up group), BFUG Board and the secretariat regarding their roles, tasks and interplay;
- membership, including application processes and support for membership, as well as its suspension and termination;
- decision-making processes and procedures, including voting, the role, tasks and ways of working;
- and their reflection in relevant rules and documents.

2. The exploration of a Long-term Secretariat for the EHEA

Over the past 15 years, in view of a growing and more complex workload that the BFUG and its secretariats had to face, the establishment of a more enduring secretariat has been discussed on several occasions. Beyond a discussion of its potential benefits and challenges, through the work of the TF, for the first time its feasibility and possible models have been explored in more detail, and principles and values for its establishment have been drawn up.

### C. Outputs and achievements

The TF RR developed within a relatively short period (Oct 2022 – May 2024) several documents related to main areas of its focus:

1. **Rules of procedures for the EHEA**, a complex, restructured document addressing key issues for EHEA governance, membership, operations and processes within the existing structures. The TF developed the document in two parts:

- a. **Rules of procedures for the EHEA** covering key mission, principles, membership, structures, roles and competences within the EHEA. This part was adopted by the ministers as an annex to the Tirana communique
- b. **Rules of procedures for the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)**, which are proposed to be adopted by the BFUG. This part should complement the above-mentioned Rules of procedures for EHEA, as it provides more detailed, operational rules, changes of which are within the mandate of the BFUG.

The document has been developed over several rounds: the BFUG discussed first the concept, and had then opportunity to comment on a first draft, and subsequently on its revised versions. Each version was supported by an explanatory note of the proposed changes. Some of the working versions included possible changes in respective formulations of the Rules of procedures resulting from a possible launch of a Long-term Secretariat and may thus serve any further work.

2. **Long-term EHEA Secretariat.** The TF prepared concepts notes and outlines to facilitate the discussion in the BFUG on the Secretariat, its role, tasks and status, its potential models, and the principles for its establishment. In total 4 various conceptual documents have been developed for the four BFUG meetings in 2023 and 2024. The earlier ones provided an overview of different models of organisation and institutional status of a Long-term Secretariat. The later ones developed more concrete proposals for its establishment:
  - a. **Revised Concept Note: Long-Term Secretariat**, a document developed for the BFUG meeting in February 2024 in Brussels. Building on the previous versions, it summarises the benefits and challenges of various solutions, overview of potential models, provides a detailed explanation and interpretation of the proposed principles' rationale and indicates – as requested by some BFUG members – indicative cost calculations.
  - b. **Long-term EHEA Secretariat. Principles and Roadmap.** The document was submitted to the BFUG in April 2024, proposed as an annex to the Tirana Communique. It summarises the main principles for the Long-term Secretariat and proposed concrete steps and a timeline for its establishment. The roadmap foresees among others the process of identifying a host country or organisaiton for the Long-Term Secretariat, and a milestone of the BFUG decision on the Long-term Secretariat by the spring 2026, and, if agreed, its launch with the Ministerial conference in 2027. This has been the basis of the commitment in the Tirana Communique of the ministerial conference. The BFUG accepted the principles and roadmap as a basis for further work, yet did not see it necessary to include these as a separate annex, as some of the principles have been integrated in the communique text.
3. A **proposal of the text for the Tirana Communique** related to the rules of procedures, including a mandate for the BFUG to explore the Long-term Secretariat, with the goal to launch it by 2027.

#### **D. State of play and recommendations for further work**

- a. The Rules of Procedures for the EHEA were adopted by the ministers in Tirana, the Rules of Procedures for the BFUG have been commented and adjusted accordingly, thus the first upcoming BFUG (September 2024 in Budapest) is invited to adopt this part.
- b. As regards the governing structure of the EHEA, the TF RR has focused mainly on the role and status of the secretariat, while the other governing structures (BFUG, BFUG Board) might be affected by the chosen solution. For example, the BFUG and depending on the final governance structure chosen, the Board, would have a stronger role towards the Secretariat, but this also comes with some responsibilities. Overall, governance and management should become more transparent.
- c. The TF provided possible models for the legal status of the Secretariat, and recommended a solution ensuring a high level of independence from any individual BFUG member, including the hosting country, while keeping open the option for secondment opportunities and in-kind contributions. The TF RR strongly recommended that – if the 2026 decision confirms - the Long-term Secretariat should be launched in good time to take up its role immediately after the ministerial conference in 2027. Any delay may lead to new uncertainties and additional work, as it would require the development of an interim solution, respectively yet another host, with the Long-term Secretariat postponed until 2030 – with the risk of losing momentum.
- d. The entire process of establishing the secretariat, i.e. further development of the concept, model, status, and its link to the EHEA governing structures operation, the identification and selection of



a host, and the funding model should be supported and facilitated by a dedicated BFUG working group which would build on the concepts, models and proposals developed by the TF RR. Whereas the TF RR was composed of experts, this forthcoming working group should consist of BFUG members representatives. It may nevertheless be desirable to keep its size rather small and time-bound by a launch of the future model of the Secretariat.

- e. The code of ethics for which some BFUG members called should be developed by other ways and means, e.g. by few BFUG members volunteering or a smaller TF.

## **E. Task Force composition**

The Task Force members were appointed by the BFUG in Brno, 8 October 2022 in their personal capacity reflecting upon their long-term engagement within the EHEA structures and experience from acting within the EHEA on behalf of governmental and/or non-governmental organisations.

- Michael Gaebel, EUA, TF Co-Chair
- Michal Karpisek, Czech Republic, TF Co-Chair
- Luca Lantero, Italy, TF Co-Chair<sup>1</sup>
- Sjur Bergan, expert, formerly Council of Europe
- Irina Geanta, Romania
- Frank Petrikowski, Germany
- Linda Pustina, Albania, BFUG Vice-chair
- Kinga Szuly, European Commission
- Colin Tueck, expert, formerly EQAR

For division of roles and engagement of the TF members see further parts including an overview of attendance. The TF meetings were attended by the BFUG Secretariat staff.

## **F. Activities, meetings and reporting to the BFUG and meetings**

The TF took up its work immediately after its establishment in October 2022, with a first online meeting on 22 December 2022 and a first hybrid meeting on 15 January 2023. It continued to meet at least once a month, occasionally more often, and also in two subsets, focusing on the revision of the RoP, and the concept proposal for the Secretariat respectively. Meetings were held mainly online (15) and three times in person, allowing for online attendance.

Since its launch, the TF reported regularly at all four BFUG Board and five BFUG meetings (see below). The BFUG was invited to discuss and comment on documents during the BFUG meetings, and usually also in writing after the BFUG. On this basis, revised and new documents have been prepared. The TF agenda was discussed in depth at a devoted thematic session in Stockholm (May 2023) and as an agenda item of the BFUG agenda (Madrid, November 2023; Brussels, February 2024; Brussels, April 2024, Tirana, May 2024).

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<sup>1</sup> Resigned from the Task Force on 12 February 2024.

## BFUG, BFUG Board meetings

Meeting	Agenda related to the TF, comments
<b>BFUG</b> Brno, CZ 7.-8.11.2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of the Task Force, appointment of its members</li> <li>ToRs,</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_CZ_KZ_82_ToRs_Task_Force_Review_of_Rules_and_Procedures.pdf">https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_CZ_KZ_82_ToRs_Task_Force_Review_of_Rules_and_Procedures.pdf</a></p>
<b>BFUG Board</b> Sarajevo, BiH 31.03.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update on the concept, approach and key issues of the TF</li> <li>Presentation, <a href="#">BFUG Board SE BA 83 7 TF RR Update.pdf (ehea.info)</a></li> <li>Agreement on a thematic session at the next BFUG</li> </ul>
<b>BFUG</b> Stockholm, SE 11-12.05.2023	<p>first <a href="#">report</a>, comprising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a tentative working schedules with envisaged milestones and outputs,</li> <li>the suggestion to organize the Rules of Procedure in two parts, one for the BFUG, and one for the Ministers ("Statutes" – later RoP EHEA). The BFUG requested to have two parts integrated in one document.</li> <li>A concept note on a permanent (later: "long-term") Secretariat, as non-profit association or foundation, potentially to be hosted by one of the BFUG members or consultative members. The BFUG requested to explore these options, and the organisational, legal and financial consequences in more detail, and also to provide a more thorough analysis of the benefits and challenges of both, the present rotating and the proposed long-term Secretariat.</li> </ul>
<b>BFUG Board</b> Tbilisi, GE 2.10.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">TF Presentation including issues to discuss and proposal for further steps</a></li> <li><a href="#">Rules of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), version 14.9.2023</a></li> <li><a href="#">Permanent EHEA Secretariat Concept note and options for the Tbilisi Board &amp; the Madrid BFUG (15.9.23)</a></li> <li>Agreement on a specific item within the BFUG agenda</li> </ul>
<b>BFUG</b> Madrid 16.-17.11.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">TF RR Update&gt; Presentation, RoP and Secretariat. Update &amp; issues for discussion</a></li> <li><a href="#">Cover document: report and input to the BFUG discussion</a></li> <li>A draft of <a href="#">Rules of Procedure for the European Higher Education Area (revised from the previous "statutes" and for the BFUG)</a>, in one document.</li> <li>A reference list of changes in these rules, referring to integration and proposed adjustment of the current Rules of Procedures 2021 - 2024 (shared by the email, n/a on the EHEA website)</li> <li>Permanent EHEA Secretariat. Concept note for the Madrid BFUG, version 5.11.2023 (shared by the email, n/a on the EHEA website)</li> </ul> <p>Feedback on RoP, especially voting and which issues might (not) be subject to voting. The discussion on Secretariat showed a reasonable number of members in favour of a long-term solution, yet also some who have concerns or need more information.</p>

Meeting	Agenda related to the TF, comments
	<p>The BFUG agreed on written comments to the documents until 13 December 2023.</p>
<b>BFUG Board</b> Vatican 23.01.2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Draft. Briefing Note on the Revised Rules of Procedures and the New Arrangements for the Secretariat (for the Brussels BFUG)</a>, update on developments, changes, based on the BFUG discussion and comments, both regarding the RoP and the Secretariat. List of issues for the BFUG to agree upon.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Draft: Issues for consideration and discussion Revision of the ROP (for the Brussels BFUG)</a> with a commented list of main issues to agree at the BFUG meeting</li> <li>• <a href="#">Permanent EHEA Secretariat, Draft Revised Concept Note for the February 2024 BFUG Meeting</a> with more elaborated details, alternatives</li> <li>• <a href="#">TF ROP Suggestion for the Tirana Communique</a>, proposal of formulations related to the relevant issues – rules of procedure, EHEA Secretariat and funding</li> </ul>
<b>BFUG</b> Brussels, BE 19.-20.02.2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">TF RR Presentation at the BFUG, main issues</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Draft: Briefing Note* on the Revised Rules of Procedures and the New Arrangements for the Secretariat (for the Brussels BFUG)</a>, A briefing note for the BFUG delegates, helping them to explain the rational for and changes in Rules of Procedure and the Secretariat approach at their home organisations. List of issues for the BFUG to agree upon.</li> <li>• <a href="#">A revised concept note: Long-term EHEA Secretariat</a> with key principles, details of alternative solutions, financial estimates and a proposed roadmap</li> <li>• Draft <a href="#">Rules of Procedures of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)</a>, revised in consideration of feedback received from the BFUG members at and after the Madrid BFUG (up to 13 December)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Explanatory note: Revision of the draft Rules of Procedure after the Madrid BFUG</a>. A note listing the proposals received from individual BFUG delegates on the RoP, and the decisions that the TF proposed to take. This was necessary, as change proposals did always align, and a selected number of items also required discussion in and decision by the BFUG.</li> <li>• <a href="#">TF RR Suggestion for the Tirana communique</a>, proposal of formulations related to the relevant issues – rules of procedure, EHEA Secretariat and support and roadmap</li> </ul> <p>The discussion addressed concerns about some details on voting within the proposed Rules of procedure. The discussion on the secretariat has not progressed, also due to late distribution/release of the timely submitted TF documents by the BFUG Co-chairs who were concerned about their status and validity. As a new element, it was agreed to include a feasibility decision on the Long-term secretariat in spring 2026, based on evaluation of the concrete arrangements.</p> <p>Written comments requested by 27 February 2024.</p>

Meeting	Agenda related to the TF, comments
<b>BFUG Board</b> Vatican 12.03.2024	TF RR didn't provide any new documents as the previous versions and key issues were not thoroughly discussed in the previous BFUG, and BFUG members had been invited to provide written comments (concrete comments to the RoP, statement regarding the view on the Long-term Secretariat), to be included in the updated version for the next BFUG.
<b>BFUG</b> Brussels 11.-12.04. 2024	<p>The TF provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A revised and updated <a href="#">Rules of Procedures for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and for the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)</a> with consideration of the comments received until the end of February 2024 and also a <a href="#">comparative version of these Rule of Procedure</a> to show the changes that had been introduced since the previous BFUG. As regards the Rules of Procedure. It also provided a written <a href="#">Update on the revision of the Rules of Procedure</a>, a summative update on the changes and the last pending issue about the voting regime for discussion and decision by the BFUG. The TF informed the BFUG that colleagues with legal background had provided comments on the text.</li> <li>• The TF had revised its <a href="#">proposal for the Communique</a> with an <a href="#">Annex to the Communique. Long-term EHEA Secretariat. Principles and Roadmap</a> comprising more guiding details for potential launch of the Long-term Secretariat with a roadmap towards such launch in 2027, should this option be agreed as feasible at the BFUG in the spring 2026.</li> <li>• In order to allow for a focused and effective discussion on the main issues, the TF developed a <a href="#">presentation</a> and offered a <a href="#">List of key questions regarding the Long-term Secretariat</a></li> </ul> <p>As a result, the BFUG endorsed the Rules of Procedure with some changes. It was agreed that the RoP were still to undergo language editing, and after that to be recirculated to the BFUG for information, as a document to be adopted by the Ministerial Conference as an annex (the part with RoP EHEA).</p> <p>The proposal for the Communique was agreed with some amendments. While the Principles and Roadmap for the Long-Term Secretariat were not to be included in the Communique as an annex, the BFUG agreed to use the document as a guide for the continued work during the next working period.</p>
<b>BFUG</b> Tirana, AL 29.05.2024	The BFUG agreed on the final version of the <a href="#">Rules of Procedure for the EHEA</a> to be included as an annex to the Tirana Communique.

## Task Force Meetings

The Task Force undertook its role with a high intensity, reflecting the short time available and a complexity of possible solutions and proposals. After agreement on the concept, tasks and roles within the group – including division of the TF into two sub-groups:

- Review of the Rules of Procedure – Michael Gaebel, Sjur Bergan, Michal Karpisek
- Concept of the Secretariat and EHEA structures – Luca Lantero, Colin Tueck, Irina Geanta, Kinga Szuly, Michal Karpisek

The TF met three times in person (one full day meeting in Brussels in Jan 2023, short coordination around the BFUG meeting in Stockholm, May 2023 and one full day for finalisation of proposals in Brussels, Jan 2024). The main coordination was done via 15 short, intensive on-line meetings. All of these were planned well in advance, the online meetings as regular ones to allow participation of all members. Almost all meetings were attended by a representative of the Secretariat, but not for every meeting precise minutes have been provided. Given the time required by the Secretariat to prepare the minutes, and the relatively high frequency of meeting in certain periods, the co-chairs took the habit to circulate main conclusions and updates immediately after the meeting.

There were other ad hoc meetings of smaller sub-groups and informal meetings of the co-chairs.

No	Date Form, location	Issues
1	16.12.2022 online	Preparatory meeting, expectations, first agreements, co-chairmanship
2	13.01.2023 Brussels, BE	Work plan, concept of formal arrangement of rules and procedures (structure and framework), key guiding questions, division of sub-tasks
3	10.03.2023 online	Input to the BFUG Board, discussion on EHEA Statutes, Secretariat, concept and focus of the Thematic block within the BFUG in Stockholm, further steps
4	19.04.2023 online	Reflection of the BFUG Board conclusions, review of existing drafts (EHEA Statutes, concept paper on the alternative of introducing the Permanent Secretariat) and preparation of the thematic block for the BFUG discussion and indication of future direction of work.
5	10.05.2023 online	Final preparation for the BFUG thematic session, division of roles
6	12.05.2023 Stockholm, SE	Debriefing from BFUG, agreement on further division of work among the sub-groups and TF members
7	19.07.2023 online	Review of progress, concept of Permanent secretariat and further specification of alternatives, revised draft of EHEA Rules
8	6.09.2023 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Finishing documents for the BFUG Board, preparation for the BFUG Board, consultation of alternatives for the secretariat, schedule
9	9.10.2023 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Reflection of the BFUG Board conclusions, review of existing drafts – review of the secretariat preparation, draft EHEA Rules, preparation for the BFUG
10	13.11.2023 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Preparation for the BFUG Madrid discussions
11	11.12.2023 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Reflection on the Madrid BFUG conclusions. Plan of further steps – sub-groups RoP, Secretariat. Planning the January 2024 meeting in Brussels.
12	18.12.2023 online	Review of the Long-term Secretariat concept, rethinking the status, approach, principles. Agreement on development of new version of docs for the BFUG. Brainstorming for the TF meeting in Brussels.

No	Date Form, location	Issues	Form, location									
			Form, location									
13	10.1.2024 Brussels, BE	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Review and finalisation of the documents for the BFUG. Feasible hosting organisations, reactions. Roadmap. Plan of further meetings.										
14	29.1.2024 Online	Update on the BFUG Board conclusions, upcoming BFUG agenda. Finalisation of docs for the BFUG. Possible legal expertise capacity.										
15	12.2.2024 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. TF documents on hold by the BFUG co-chairs, attempts to contact BFUG co-chairs, dissent views of two TF members (arguments?), briefing note, presentation for the BFUG										
16	21.3.2024 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Update from the BFUG Board meeting, preparation of the input to the BFUG – proposal for the communique, revised RoP, annex on the Secretariat (principles, roadmap)										
17	8.4.2024 online	Regular monthly meeting TF RR. Preparation for the BFUG meeting, final arrangements. Possible further steps, ToR for the potential new WG. TF report.										
18	10.6.2024 online	Final meeting TF RR. Debriefing from the Ministerial conference in Tirana, new WG TORs, TF report										

### Task Force meeting attendance

Most of the TF members were actively engaged and contributed regularly, though not everybody has been able to attend all meetings, which was also expected, given the higher frequency of meeting required in certain periods, in particular in the end of 2023 and in 2024.

Date	Form Location	M. Gaebel	M. Karpisek	L. Lantero	S. Bergan	I. Geanta	F. Petrikowski	L. Pustina	K. Szuly	C. Tueck	BFUG Secret.	Note
16.12.2022	online	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	
13.01.2023	Brussels, BE	P	P	P	P	P		o	P	P	P	
10.03.2023	online	o	o		o	o	o	o		o	o	
31.03.2023	Sarajevo											BFUG Board
19.04.2023	online		o		o	o	o	o	o	o	o	
08.05.2023	online	o	o		o	o	o	o	o	o	o	
11.05.2023	Stockholm											BFUG
12.05.2023	Stockholm	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	P	P	
19.07.2023	online	o	o	o	o			o	o	o		
06.09.2023	online	o	o	o	o	o	o		o	o	o	
02.10.2023	Tbilisi											BFUG Board
09.10.2023	online	o	o	o	o	o	o		o	o	o	
13.11.2023	online	o	o		o	o	o		o	o	o	

Date	Form Location	M. Gaebel	M. Karpisek	L. Lantero	S. Bergan	I. Geanta	F. Petrikowski	L. Pustina	K. Szuly	C. Tueck	BFUG Secret.	Note
16.11.2023	Madrid											BFUG
11.12.2023	online	o	o		o		o		o	o	o	
18.12.2023	online	o	o		o	o				o		
10.01.2024	Brussels	P	P		P	P			P	P	P	
23.01.2024	Vatican											BFUG Board
29.01.2023	online	o	o		o	o			o	o	o	
12.02.2024	online	o	o		o	o			o	o	o	
19.02.2024	Brussels											BFUG
12.03.2024	Vatican											BFUG Board
21.03.2024	online	o	o		o		o	o	o	o		
08.04.2024	online	o	o		o		o					
11.04.2024	Brussels											BFUG
29.05.2024	Tirana											BFUG
10.06.2024	online	o	o		o							

Legend: o – attendance online, P – present in person, blank – absent

## G. List of Annexes

- Annex 1. [Task Force Establishment of a Long-Term Secretariat of the European Higher Education Area. A draft of Term of Reference for period 2024 – 2027](#)
- Annex 2. [Revised Concept Note: Long-Term EHEA Secretariat. Document for the BFUG in Brussels, February 2024](#)
- Annex 3. [Rules of Procedures for the European Higher Education Area \(EHEA\) and for the Bologna Follow-Up Group \(BFUG\)](#)
- Annex 4. [Terms of Reference of Task Force on the Review of the Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the European Higher Education Area. Document for the work period 2022 – 2024](#)

Note: The part 1 of the [Rules of Procedures for the European Higher Education Area \(EHEA\)](#) has been adopted by the ministers and is available as an annex to the Tirana Communiqué.