

**Minutes of the**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Task Force on establishing a long-term Secretariat meeting**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2025**  
**European University Association, Brussels, Belgium**

**List of participants**

Nr.	NAME	COUNTRY/Organisation
1.	Michael Gaebel	EUA, Co-chair
2.	Michal Karpisek	Czech Republic, Co-chair
3.	Hugo Miguel Pinto de Abreu	European Commission
4.	Aleksandar Šušnjar	EQAR
5.	Una Strand Viðarsdóttir	Iceland
6.	András Báló	Hungary
7.	Aydin Aslan	Türkiye
8.	Horia Onița	EHEA Secretariat
9.	Luminița Matei	Romania (online)

Kazakhstan, Italy and San Marino were absent.

**1. Welcome and introduction**

The EUA Co-chair welcomed the TF members to the EUA premises and outlined the key objectives of the meeting: going through the applications, considering the shape of the long-term Secretariat, and determining how these two topics would be presented at the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen. He clarified that the TF would go through the applications to determine what required clarification, without attempting to review them, which would be premature. The Czech Co-chair added that on the second day of the meeting the TF would discuss how the applications would be dealt with after the clarifications would be received from applicants.

The Romanian, Czech and Turkish representatives formally notified the TF of their conflict of interest in reviewing their application, pursuant to the Call adopted by the BFUG.

**2. Report on the applications received**

The Head of Secretariat (HoS) gave updates on the administrative procedure, starting with the issuing of the Call, the elaboration of the two templates (application form and budget) and the Q&A document that was sent to the BFUG and published on the website. He informed members that the only questions received came from Ireland. The HoS further presented the criteria for the administrative compliance

check performed by the Secretariat for the 5 applications received, coming from Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Türkiye. Out of the 5 applications, all except Romania had to submit additional information regarding their applications, which they had done in due time. As such, he concluded by appreciating that all applications passed the administrative compliance check according to the Call adopted by the BFUG.

### 3. Proposal for process & approach for the review from the TF Co-chairs

The EUA co-chair emphasised that currently the TF would only go through the applications for asking additional questions for clarification. The Czech co-chair added that clarifications were needed to be able to present to the BFUG the accurate situation regarding the fulfilment of the established criteria.

The Icelandic representative highlighted that the TF was composed of enough members to review applications without conflicts of interest and proposed that for each application should be reviewed by 3 reviewers, so a least 2 BFUG members, and, if possible of 1 consultative member. Supported by the EUA Co-chair, she further asked the Secretariat to draw lots and propose a list of reviewers for each application that would follow the rules regarding conflicts of interest and composition. The HoS pointed out that bearing in mind the number of TF members and those who were in conflict of interest, it was possible that the TF analyses the applications without any involvement of TF members who were in a conflict of interest.

The EUA Co-chair underscored that the objective of the discussion was to identify extra details needed for the review of the applications, including cases in which the requests towards applicants may have lacked clarity. Once the necessary information and clarification has been received from the applicants, each application would undergo review by three reviewers independently from each other.

### 4. Review of applications

#### 4.1 Expression of interest from Cyprus

The EUA Co-chair introduced the application, which was submitted by the Ministry with the proposal to host the Secretariat in Nicosia. The applicant expressed confidence in the smooth set up of the Secretariat as an association or foundation, with the help of the ministry, and mentioned as an advantage that rent for premises would be relatively low. It offered no financial contribution and no provision of office space, but an in-kind contribution in terms of provision of support.

The European Commission appreciated that the expression of interest was overall solid, however it did not contain any details allowing to understand whether an association or a foundation would be preferable. He continued by pointing out that the application clearly specified matters pertaining to recruitment (appealing conditions for staff and favourable tax system), secondment and funding (assurance that any financial surplus could be reinvested in the Secretariat). The Commission considered that initially the budget seemed too optimistic on operational expenses, especially on professional fees (legal, accounting), yet comparatively appeared more realistic than the other applications. On the budget, the EUA co-chair added that the Cypriot application had the highest logistical costs.

The Icelandic representative considered the application as a solid proposal which yet did not provide much information on several issues. She emphasised the importance of allocating sufficient financial resources to accounting services, ensuring a transparent and reliable financial management. The HoS supported the remark and added that under the present practice of the Secretariat several costs on legal or accounting issues were internalised by the host. The EUA Co-chair noted that this should also be considered by the TF in its further discussions and planning of the long-term Secretariat proposal.

Supported by EUA and EQAR, the Czech Co-chair pointed out that the application of Cyprus, but also most of the others, did not clarify the link between the legal form and the BFUG structures. The legal arrangements required establishing and running an association or foundation may contain conditions and approaches that may not align with the BFUG and its rules, require their modifications and even the

establishment of a specific governing structure within the BFUG. Secondly, the Czech Co-chair remarked that the salaries for the HoS and policy staff were not internationally competitive. He suggested to consider the budget proposals as an indication, in particular for the local operating costs and employment of local staff, but proposed that the TF should develop a proposal for a competitive salary for the HoS and policy staff.

EQAR considered that all but one application lacked sufficiently concrete and detailed information regarding the legal form. He also reflected on the difficulty of comparing the extent to which the salary proposals were competitive without knowing the tax regime or the relation to the average salary. In reply, the Icelandic representative emphasised that cost of living differed from place to place, but the level of salary for HoS and policy staff had to be competitive at European level. In this sense, the Czech Co-chair suggested to ask the applicants not about salaries but about the tax regime.

The Czech co-chair suggested to ask applicants about the legal framework, organisational bodies and how they are established, which would also be important for those applications that suggested to establish the SEC through an approach that would imply a formal relationship with a government body or another national organisation. EQAR supported the view, and added that in the cases where an existing body was proposed to host the Secretariat, there are trade-offs that would need to be made and the BFUG should be aware of those. He added that such trade-offs were present also for applications proposing associations, e.g. the specific roles for the board of directors.

The Romanian representative suggested that the discussion should follow more closely each of the criteria for assessment published in the call and that any question for clarification should not go beyond the assessment criteria and the information requested in the Call for expressions of interest.

Outside of the discussion on the application, the Czech co-chair reminded that the issue of the BFUG membership fees need to be taken into account in the feasibility study (at the BFUG in Cyprus). Iceland added that the TF should discuss whether the fees would be equal or differentiated.

#### *4.2 Expression of interest from the Czech Republic*

The EUA Co-chair presented the application, outlining that the proposal includes the Secretariat as part of the national Erasmus+ agency, without any individual legal structure, which likely implies that the Secretariat would be subject to the legal and administrative rules of the Czech government, or at least those pertaining to public agencies. He added that among the applications, this one has the lowest budget as some costs would be internalised in the agency.

Supported by the European Commission, the Romanian representative suggested that the Czech colleagues would need to clarify how other European public authorities could pay membership fees to an entity that is part of a Czech governmental structure, without entering an international treaty. The Czech co-chair suggested to ask the Czech colleagues whether there are any precedents of such payments to their national agency.

The European Commission considered that the framework proposed by the Czech Republic raised several issues in terms of the independence of the Secretariat, such as: i) the nature of the commitment between the Czech government and the BFUG, whether it would be a contract, and who would sign it on behalf of BFUG, or a soft promise; ii) any type of commitment could be superseded due to changes in of Czech laws, administration rules and public financing rules; iii) the SEC would need to follow the Czech public law for finances, public procurement and hiring; iv) the Secretariat and its staff would be subject to rules of the ministry or public agencies, which could conflict with the accountability towards the BFUG. Thus, the Commission suggested further legal analysis on the implications of the Czech proposal.

In reply, the EUA co-chair highlighted that the Czech proposal distinguishes between administrative staff (e.g. accountancy) that would be dealt by the agency, and operational staff that would be a different unit specifically for the Secretariat, acknowledging nevertheless that the practical autonomy would be difficult

to measure. He added that in terms of accountancy and IT, there is also the question of how permissible the rules of the host organisation are.

#### *4.3 Expression of interest from Germany*

The EUA co-chair introduced the application of Germany, which proposes to host the Secretariat within the DAAD, however, operating independently. He shared his understanding that the proposal did not suggest having the Secretariat as part of DAAD but rather host it at its premises to benefit from its infrastructure and services. He nevertheless remarked that the application gave no information on the legal form of the Secretariat. The EC concurred with the interpretation and asked about how the entity would function.

The Czech co-chair supported the request to ask the German colleagues for clarification and also be asked whether the Secretariat would have a separate legal form, which would the options and how to set it up.

Iceland pointed out to the good track record of DAAD in international relations and Bologna projects and their global connections.

#### *4.4 Expression of interest from Romania*

The EUA co-chair introduced the application from Romania, emphasising that it was the most elaborate one and particularly detailed about the legal form, the implication for choosing an association or foundation, the links with the BFUG governance etc. Iceland suggested that the other applicants should be requested to provide comparable level of detail for their own proposals. The Commission concurred with the appreciation on the detailed proposal and the commendable open assessment of difficulties in each of the alternatives proposed.

The EUA co-chair found the details helpful for understanding the complexities of associations and foundations in general. The application suggests various alternatives for establishing the SEC, which option to set it up as an association, with the support of a HEI the easiest one. Supported by Iceland, the EUA Co-Chair concluded that such a solution would nevertheless raise the question of the independence of the Secretariat in relation to that HEI, whether the Secretariat would still be a separate legal entity and what would be the role of the HEI in the governance of the legal entity. Iceland added that in turn, the HEI should also be independent from the government. In addition, the question arose of what would be the implications for the Romanian ministry joining an association that would be established by a Romanian HEI.

The discussion brought that generally as a legal form for the SEC, an association might be preferable to a foundation, as it would allow for new members to join at the same rights. The Czech Co-chair asked how easy it would be for ministries to become members of an association, EQAR replied that in its experience, there has never been a problem with BFUG members joining the association. The EC representative considered that, from a financial standpoint, the association would bring the most benefits.

As the application indicated as an example the Black Sea University Association, this could give some indication on feasibility and practice of the association status in Romania. EQAR added that typically founders have special rights in most legal entities and suggested to ask Romania to clarify this issue.

The EUA co-chair pointed to a potential challenge regarding the requirement that member of the Board of the association would have to be registered in a Romanian court. The EUA Co-chair, Czech Co-chair and Iceland suggested as a solution the establishment of a more stable governance board for the association, which could include those BFUG Board members who not rotate so often.

The HoS added that in the case of EQAR, only part of the Board is registered individually at the local court. In this sense, one would need to explore the degree of flexibility that the legal arrangements, also with regards to powers to be altered or delegated.

On another note, Iceland further pointed out that in the context of the governing structures, there should also be a discussion on the powers of the Vice Chair, which may sometimes become problematic.

The EUA Co-chair concluded by reminding that the BFUG has been quite explicit in its view that an integrating of the Secretariat into an already existing organisational structure should be avoided. That some applications propose such an approach nevertheless may point to the difficulty of establishing a different, completely independent legal entity. The EUA Co-chair suggested considering situation of QA agencies in applicant countries, which could be useful in assessing what independence entails.

#### *4.5 Expression of interest from Türkiye*

The EUA Co-chair introduced the application, which suggests establishing the Secretariat as an international association in Istanbul. It could be situated on the premises of a HEI or the applicant would provide support for finding another suitable location.

The application also specified that the establishment of the Secretariat would require a formal consent and permission of the President of the Republic. Iceland and the Czech co-chair pointed out that this requires clarifications what exactly this permission is needed for (the establishment or also other elements and activities of the Secretariat), whether the permission could be withdrawn, which are the requirements for issuing such permission, whether any governance structures would be mandatory, whether there are examples of other associations established under such a permission and how long it would take to get one. An issue could also be the moment when such a permission should be requested in relation to the timeline for establishing the Secretariat, e.g. if the consent is needed after the staff would have already been selected.

The European Commission raised the issue of the timeframe for in-kind support, noting that Türkiye proposed an 8-year timeframe. Türkiye may have suggested the 8-year period, as the application form mentions that the long-term Secretariat would need be reassessed in 2033. However, it was agreed to ask the other applicants, on whether their in-kind support is unlimited in terms of time.

### **5. General discussion on assessment criteria**

The Czech co-chair proposed to go through each assessment criteria and discuss what additional information might be needed, highlighting that so far discussions centred around independence whereas the other criteria are more related to an implementation commitment. The EUA co-chair suggested to go a step further on discussing what shape the Secretariat could take and then see whether sufficient information from applicants was offered in that regard.

#### *5.1 Independence and accountability*

The Czech co-chair highlighted that whereas for the independence criteria the TF could reflect on the governance, regarding the role of the host, the link with Bologna structures etc.; but the impact of other issues, such as for example the impact of the labour laws, were more difficult to assess. He proposed as a solution to hire external experts to analyse the frameworks (through the EU funded project), but this would make sense only after the applicants have been discussed and assessed by the BFUG at its meeting on 15-16 Dec in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The TF discussed whether the absence of a sufficient degree of independence for the SEC should result in discarding an application. It was agreed to request the necessary clarification and information from applicants, giving them the opportunity to guarantee that there would be no interference, and to explain how exactly this would be ensured.

Supported by the Czech co-chair, the EUA co-chair considered that applicants should have the chance to improve their proposals, so in the case of the Czech application to ask them to consider proposing the Secretariat under its own legal form, as an association and foundation, like other proposals. When the option of 'other legal form' was given in the Call, they were not expecting to receive proposals for a



Secretariat as part of a national agency. He added that all applicants should be asked to provide information the two legal forms, association and foundation.

Romania pointed out that the Call for expressions of interest adopted by the BFUG stipulated that the TF can ask applicants additional questions, which would be needed for the clarification of their proposals, while in this case it would be a suggestion from the TF to alter the initial proposal.

The EUA co-chair suggested going through all applications and agreeing on what they should provide as additional information. Subsequently, the Czech co-chair proposed that all applicants should be asked how independence would be ensured, what would be the budget rules and the legal framework, as well as a question on how the Secretariat could be established as an association and as foundation in their country.

Iceland further expressed the need to ask all applicants the same questions. She pointed out that otherwise, some applicants may receive very specific questions while others would receive only general questions. The Czech co-chair argued that specific questions are necessary, for example in the case of Germany and Czech Republic where there is no clear indication of what the legal structure was. While all applicants should clarify the implications of the legal entity and the accountability of office holders, some, for example Germany, would also need to clarify the legal form. In reply, Iceland pointed out that having similar questions would be a matter of transparency. She asked the Secretariat to make a list of all the elements discussed in the meeting.

Romania reiterated their position on being very careful not to add things outside the Call adopted by the BFUG, and in this sense, the TF should ask applicants only additional questions which are necessary for the review. She considered that indicating to the applicants what they should consider in their application might give the impression that the TF already did the review and now asks applicants to continue filling the application in the direction that the TF would be satisfied with. She supported Iceland's suggestion to ask general questions and asked until which point in time the TF would ask questions. She also asked whether there would be any page limit or whether the applicants could completely rewrite their application.

The Commission agreed that there needs to be a maximum number of pages, due to the different degrees of clarity of the initial expressions of interest. EQAR disagreed with Romania, stating that this was a Call for interest, not a legal tender, and that he would be comfortable with doing whatever serves the purposes best as long as it did not clearly go against the ToRs. Iceland replied that there should be only one more round of questions for clarification and then the review needs to take place, with the traffic light system.

The Czech co-chair added that in relation to the criteria regarding 'no legal, financial and organisational responsibilities or competencies beyond those shared collectively by the BFUG', additional information would be needed from all applicants but Romania. On the legal responsibilities, the HoS clarified that the next principle of the call states that the Secretariat would be an operational entity with legal personality.

The EUA co-chair concluded that on the issue of independence the TF should remind applicants what was requested in the call, and that the Secretariat should prepare a list of general and specific questions for applicants based on the discussions in the meeting, as for some matters it would not be necessary to ask clarifications to all applicants.

## *5.2 Sustainability*

The EUA co-chair inquired how to ask applicants to clarify the duration of their support, and, if unclear, what it would entail, considering that in the end the BFUG would need to ensure that the Secretariat would be adequately resourced. The Commission suggested to ask applicants to provide a firm and clear assurance regarding the substantial commitments that have been made, e.g. if the applicant proposes free office premises. The EUA Co-chair added that the same would apply for utilities.

## *5.3 Staff*

Iceland considered that the salaries provided for the HoS and policy staff were not internationally competitive or comparable, suggesting that it would be beneficial to obtain information from other international organisations.

Romania pointed out that this would mean that the applicants would be expected to change their application. For the case of salaries, Iceland, supported by the EC, pointed out that the TF could have provided a better indication of what internationally competitive salaries mean, allowing the applicants to base their estimations on. The HoS added that from a purely comparative perspective, the TF could deploy a mathematical formula for comparison by applying a coefficient for the differences in cost of living based on comparable indexes and then asking the applicants to detail the tax brackets.

EQAR noted that applicants should clarify the legal status of their employees, including within public institutions where the Secretariat would be established under them, as this affects their rights and obligations.

The Commission also mentioned that it would be important to know, in case of applications proposing a legal form other than association or foundation, what is the legal status of employees, including whether there are fixed salary ranges, conditions or possibility for negotiation, as well as national regulations for mission costs (*per diems*). This would apply also for Germany, given that legal status was not clear and that Germany's application references salary thresholds for public servants, leaving it open whether they were indicative or compulsory. The HoS pointed out that public administration could also employ contractual staff.

Romania emphasised that while such detailed information could be asked, the BFUG might reject the approach of the TF if the additional elements would be used for review without being included in the criteria. The Commission and EQAR replied that the aim was to clarify the information in the application, with the Commission adding that it was surprising to see one or possibly two application(s) proposing to integrate the Secretariat in the public administration sector, which raised totally new questions.

Romania replied that while asking information is acceptable, their concern was about re-opening the applications too much, allowing or even expecting applicants to significantly alter their proposals. The EUA co-chair replied that it was not the intention to ask them to alter the proposal but to get clearer responses to the questions and criteria of the application form, as well as to provide some more details, which were not asked in the application form, also to avoid overburdening and deterring interested parties. Iceland added that the application form was deliberately made brief and concise, anticipating that some additional clarifications would be needed.

The EUA co-chair asked whether any questions should be included about office costs, as some proposed covering them in kind, whereas Cyprus estimated 50,000 euros and Germany 60,000 euros. He added that Germany should be asked for a clarification, as the budget mentioned office at no costs, and as office cost may depend on the legal form, similar as probably in the case of the Czech application.

#### 5.4 Legal environment

No other comments

#### 5.5 In-kind benefits

The EUA co-chair introduced the point by reflecting on the duration of the long-term Secretariat, noting that in the 2033 review the BFUG should internally assess the performance of the Secretariat rather than discuss about dissolving it or reestablishing it elsewhere. In this context, he wondered whether the applicants should be asked about a longer commitment. Iceland suggested not to further complicate the issue as this was an estimate and there are various ways to analyse the situation in 2033, including the review of the hosting arrangements or asking whether they want to continue hosting it. However, she added that the BFUG should also discuss the possibility of withdrawing the Secretariat, for example in the case the host country would be suspended.

The Czech co-chair inquired about what would happen to the property if an association were to be dissolved, given that there are rules restricting the movement of capital outside the country and regarding its donation to the municipality. The HoS replied that there were rules in statutes, national law and international private law on the liquidation of assets and donation to the municipality was the legal suppletive last resort if the members of the association did not determine the destination. Furthermore, the few physical objects of the Secretariat would be movable, so hardly any capital export limitation would apply. The Commission further added that if the statutes clearly define the goals and the BFUG withdraws their support, the objective of the association would become unachievable and thus the association would dissolve.

## **6. Information about the Erasmus+ project supporting the TF**

The Czech co-chair gave an update on the Erasmus+ project which is to support the work of the TF. The project is funded through the EHEA call, and coordinated by the Czech national Erasmus+ agency. He delineated the role of each work package, with WP1 focusing on developing the approach for the criteria, analysis of the proposals and supporting feasibility study; WP2 focusing on adjusting BFUG Rules of Procedure and offering legal expertise for setting up the Secretariat; and WP3 focusing on supporting the new Secretariat through capacity building, procedures for the appointment of director, preparation of internal documents. The project would cover the work of co-chairs, legal expertise, and capacity building, and costs of meetings, but not travel costs for TF members.

The Czech co-chair also mentioned his intention to step down from his co-chairmanship role of the TF, in consideration of the application of the Czech Republic. The details of the change of co-chairs were discussed during Day 2.

### **Day 2**

## **7. Discussion on the legal form, governance and finance of the Secretariat**

The EUA co-chair provided a recap of the main conclusions from Day 1, highlighting that applicants would receive both general (legal form to ensure an independent secretariat, how this would be feasible through an association and a foundation, what would be the potential implications for governance links with the BFUG, employment regulations, taxation and employer costs based on an international salary provided by the TF) and specific questions to individual applicants, if they had not fully answered the questions of the application form or their responses require further explanation. After receiving clarifications, three reviewers would assess each application and prepare the traffic light system. It was also agreed to send the additional information on the applications to the BFUG through the UDrive.

During the remainder of the meeting, the TF discussed funding and staff costs, governance and the organisation of the online webinar.

Romania left the meeting.

### *7.1 Legal form and governance*

In relation to the governance, the Czech co-chair suggested discussing how to analyse the independence criteria if the proposal was to locate the Secretariat within a government structure or a national public agency. EQAR replied that while not advocating for such a solution, the assessment could technically be possible by looking at various elements of independence, such as finances, nominations and accountability, with Iceland recalling the criteria for QA agencies.

The Czech co-chair argued that in this case, it should be important to consider the possible points of interference and how the BFUG governance of the Secretariat could be constructed. He recalled that in the Call the independence also relates to 'the full accountability to the BFUG, including its governing structures', asking how this could actually be probed for the applications, suggesting indicators such as the possibility to appoint and dismiss the HoS, adopting the work plan and the budget and the rescission



of the Secretariat. In the case of financial independence, he suggested indicators related to the dependence of in-kind benefits on administration changes.

The HoS added that the Call already described other facets of independence as well, for example, by saying that the financial arrangements are decided by the BFUG, coupled with the expectation of a legal entity. The European Commission also highlighted the issue of guaranteeing the ability of hiring staff if the Secretariat is part of the public administration, as the head of the national administrative body may be required to be involved, which could be perceived as interference. Consequently, EQAR suggested asking about any regulations that would impact the employment of the HoS and other staff.

In this context, the EUA co-chair asked whether it would be clear from the TF perspective that having a separate legal entity would be essential for proving the independence of the Secretariat, with EQAR suggesting that the BFUG should make that decision. The EUA co-chair also noted some advantages of placing the Secretariat in an already existing legal structure, such as supporting a smooth establishment. He considered that pros and cons should be drawn up for each option.

Türkiye highlighted that when they discussed their application, they expected an agreement to be signed between the BFUG and the host that would regulate functioning aspects, with the Czech co-chair inquiring who would sign it on behalf of the BFUG and what would be its authority.

In relation to the same principle, the EUA co-chair pointed out that the possibility to share staff, like IT support, should not be considered affecting the independence, with Iceland replying that it should be limited to administrative staff doing basic tasks.

Iceland also reminded that the discussion on governance centred around the competencies of the BFUG Board, whereas the only decision-making body is the BFUG itself. The EUA co-chair reminded that the previous TF had proposed appointing a specific board to oversee the Secretariat. The details for such a board - regarding the number of members, how they are to be nominated etc. are probably regulated in the respective national legislation. Iceland added that such an association board should serve in an administrative function and be appointed by the BFUG, similar to EQAR. EQAR added that if the legal form was an association, then the BFUG could serve as the GA and therefore act in a double capacity. The HoS noted that the situation would bring complexities if not all BFUG members would join such association.

In this sense, the EUA co-chair wondered if a foundation would be an option and what would be the rights of founders, with the HoS adding that foundations limit the capacity of joining afterwards, may create exorbitant rights for founders and, as they do not foresee a GA, would either mean that all BFUG members are in the executive (including legal liability) or that they are formally out of decision-making. The EUA co-chair asked if in this case the BFUG could appoint the board of the foundation acting as founders to act on behalf of the BFUG, with the HoS replying that in that case the principle-agent problem arises, since only the foundation board would have legal responsibility but would have to act based on the decision of the BFUG which would not share any legal responsibility, possibly creating issues. In reply, the EUA co-chair suggested that applicants should also be asked about the legal liability. Upon a question from EQAR, the HoS clarified that in the case of associations the legal liability stood differently as the board is expected to execute the decisions of the GA. EQAR emphasised that irrespective of the arrangement, it should be structured in a way that does not infringe on the powers of the BFUG.

In relation to the legal liability, Iceland highlighted the risk of deterring members from joining the foundation. The EUA co-chair wondered whether that would not be a reason to discard the foundation model altogether, with Iceland suggesting presenting to the BFUG why the model would not work based on the powers of the BFUG.

The EUA co-chair pointed out that in the case of a foundation, there was also a different regime for the issue of paying fees, as there would not be membership fees collected, with the HoS adding that the same issue applies in the case of not having a legal entity.

In relation to previous remarks, the EUA co-chair re-emphasised that the advantages of an association seemed clear and that supports the argument of asking all applicants about the status of an association in their country. EQAR and the Czech co-chair suggested not to present to applicants the question by implying that the TF considers the association as the only working solution, with the Czech co-chair proposing that the TF asks all applicants about detailing their legal form as proposed and then in subsidiary ask for other cases.

The European Commission seconded the opinion that the most suitable solution would be an association, arguing that a foundation had a totally different purpose, despite the creative use of the legal form in some countries, for other purposes. He pointed out that, in some countries, foundations could also have a board of trustees or oversight committees for the board, which would approve major strategic decisions, but they would nevertheless still not function as a general assembly.

The Czech co-chair and Iceland highlighted that only Romania considered the foundation as one of their proposals and questioned whether all applicants should be asked about this model.

Türkiye replied by stating that in the application form, they were already given the options of the legal forms, and applicants could choose, so now the questions should focus on any information they may want to add. The Czech co-chair replied that the possibilities were given since the TF had not been aware of what other legal formats could be available in their countries, and that Germany and the Czech Republic presented different formats.

The EUA co-chair proposed to keep options open to applicants and ask them to explain the rules for both, associations and foundations in their own countries.

## *7.2 Staff costs and financing*

The EUA co-chair raised a question regarding how oversight of the Secretariat's work would be conducted, inquiring who would be responsible for this task. The Czech co-chair added that usually the BFUG Work Programmes are adopted immediately after the Ministerial Conferences, but in the case of a long-term Secretariat the discussion of the Work Programme should also be linked with the budget for the Secretariat. Iceland replied that, in any case, the main elements of the WP could also be known before the Ministerial Conferences. The HoS noted that there could be a separate, annual action plan of the Secretariat, linked with its budget, for the implementation of the multi-year BFUG work programme.

Iceland emphasised that under these conditions, it should be recalled that the Secretariat is meant to support the BFUG and not every other sub-group, which could be financed separately by dedicated projects. In this context the EUA co-chair wondered whether it would then be a budget for the Secretariat or for the wider purposes of the BFUG, by carrying projects or hiring consultants through the Secretariat to execute specific functions. Iceland replied that it would be difficult to ask countries to spend money on something which is not clearly defined and may continuously grow. The Czech co-chair did not exclude that the Secretariat was also supported through other projects while making sure that it focuses on its core tasks. Iceland considered the risk of transforming the process into a Secretariat-led work, so the limits should be strict.

The EUA co-chair then suggested to move to the issue of staff costs and competitive salaries, asking whether the proposal of Germany would be appropriate as a benchmark while acknowledging the proposed salary levels might look low from the perspective of high-income countries like Norway or Switzerland. He added that the TF should also consider, in this context, the taxing policies, mobility and relocation costs, and living costs in the capital city compared to the national average.

The Czech co-chair calculated that the budget proposed by Germany would lead to around 12.000 euros per year per BFUG member, with around 15.000 euros for bigger countries if separate categories were established, and that a bigger budget may not be acceptable to the BFUG. The HoS reminded that in the revenues there would also potentially be the grant from the Commission.

The EUA co-chair recalled that the previous Task Force calculated a budget of around 865.000 euros for Belgium, including travel, which would be similar to the overall budget based on the applications. EQAR added that the budget would also be similar to their own, for a number of around 5.5 full-time equivalent staff.

Iceland suggested that once membership fees and possible categories were determined, the TF could also determine what the financial implications would be for non-payment and proposed discussing possible consequences, for example not being able to host the Secretariat or vote for issues pertaining to the Secretariat. In response to the EUA co-chair's remark that reasons for non-payment could not be limited to the amount but also included legal obstacles to payment or a lack of consequences, the Czech co-chair noted that BFUG members nevertheless pay for their EQAR membership.

The European Commission pointed out that in the case of Germany, the salary range was quite compressed with relatively high salaries for administrative staff, reflecting local costs.

## **8. Online information session**

During day 1, the co-chairs presented the initiative of organising an online information session for the BFUG members in October, which would be helpful considering the late scheduling of the BFUG in Denmark. The online meeting would ensure that the TF can provide an overview of their analysis and allow applicants to present their expression of interest and answer questions prior to the BFUG meeting. The TF discussed the organisation of the session and agreed that it would start with an introduction from the co-chairs and then ten minutes of presentation by each applicant, based on presentations with a maximum number of slides and main points to be covered suggested by the TF to ensure consistency. Iceland proposed having all the Q&A at the end of the presentations and preparing a background document for the session to pre-empt possible questions which could be clarified before the meeting. The EUA co-chair added that questions could be asked in advance, in writing during the presentation, or orally at the end.

At the BFUG in Copenhagen, the TF would directly go for the presentation of the traffic light analysis, asking for a second slot on Day 2 for discussing the issues not pertaining to choosing the host. Iceland suggested that if no other measures prevail, the shortlisting in Denmark could be done by ballots.

## **9. Next steps and AOB**

The TF agreed to send the questions for clarification to applicants by the end of July and ask them to reply in writing by the 25<sup>th</sup> of August. The online information session would be organised on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. The Icelandic representative suggested that the Secretariat should already send information to the BFUG with the applications and the save-the-date.

The next meeting of the TF was scheduled for the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, in Brussels, between 9-17 CEST. As such, the individual review process would take place between the 25<sup>th</sup> of August and the TF meeting.

The Czech co-chair reiterated his desire to take leave from his role as co-chair, with the possibility of taking it up again if the Czech application would not be shortlisted or, subsequently, selected. The Icelandic representative volunteered to take up the role instead. The Secretariat would thus follow the procedures for liaising with the BFUG co-chairs and launching an online adoption procedure for the change.

There was no other AOB.