



## BFUG Board Meeting LXXXVII

Tuesday, 23 January 2024  
09:30 - 17:30 (Rome time)

Hosted by the Holy See  
Dicastery for Culture and Education

Minutes of meeting

### List of participants

| Country/ Institution   | First Name        | Last Name      |
|--|-------------------|----------------|
| Belgium Flemish Community (BFUG Co-Chair)  | Liesbeth          | Hens           |
| Belgium French Community (BFUG Co-Chair)   | Caroline          | Hollela        |
| Belgium French Community   | Justyna           | Nerkowska      |
| Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair)   | H.E. Mons. Paul   | Tighe          |
| Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair)/ Drafting Committee Co-Chair  | Melanie           | Rosenbaum      |
| BFUG Vice-chair  | Linda             | Pustina        |
| European Commission (EC)   | Kinga             | Szuly          |
| Council of Europe  | Villano           | Qiriazzi       |
|  | Catherine         | Dolgova-Dreyer |
| EURASHE  | John              | Edwards        |
| European Students' Union (ESU)/WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair/<br>Drafting Committee Co-Chair                                 | Horia             | Onița          |
| European University Association (EUA)/ Taskforce on Review of Rules<br>and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA Co-Chair | Michael           | Gaebel         |
| Georgia (Outgoing BFUG Co-chair)   | Maia              | Shukhoshvili   |
| Iceland (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)   | Una Strand        | Viðarsdóttir   |
| Hungary (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)   | András            | Báló           |
| Working Group on Social Dimension Co-Chair   | Ninoslav Ščukanec | Schmidt        |
| Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair  | Ann Katherine     | Isaacs         |
| Working Group on Supporting the Implementation of the Roadmap for San<br>Marino's Accession to EHEA Co-Chair                   | Maija             | Innola         |
| Bologna Implementation Coordination Group Co-Chair   | Helga             | Posset         |
| Taskforce on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community<br>Co-Chair   | Cristina          | Ghitulica      |
| BFUG Secretariat (Head)  | Edlira            | Subashi        |
| BFUG Secretariat   | Kristina          | Metallari      |
| BFUG Secretariat   | Aida              | Myrto          |

The Outgoing Spanish BFUG Co-Chair, the Co-Chair of WG 1 on Monitoring, the Co-Chair of WG 2 on Fundamental Values and the Co-Chair of WG 4 on Learning and Teaching did not participate in the meeting.

### **Welcome Address by H.E. Mons. Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education**

H.E. Mons. Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education extended welcome to all participants at the BFUG Board meeting. He acknowledged the contributions of the Holy See Co-Chair and the organizational team in arranging the meeting, concluding with best wishes for a productive session.



## 1. Welcome and Introduction

### 1.1 Welcome by the BFUG Co-Chairs (Belgium Flemish and French Community, Holy See)

Melanie Rosenbaum (BFUG Co-Chair, Holy See) welcomed everyone and outlined certain technical and logistical details pertinent to the meeting.

Caroline Hollela (BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium French Community) conveyed her appreciation to the Holy See Co-Chair for the meeting's organization. She expressed hope for a constructive Board meeting, aiming to set the stage for the upcoming BFUG meeting in Brussels.

Liesbeth Hens (BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium Flemish Community) extended warm greetings to all participants. She emphasized the significance of the meeting, especially considering the upcoming Ministerial Conference, entailing a substantial amount of work requiring resolution. She concluded by wishing for a fruitful discussion.

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

Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice-Chair) extended greetings to all participants and conveyed gratitude to the Holy See for hosting the meeting. She also expressed appreciation to the BFUG Co-Chairs for their collaborative efforts and acknowledged the work accomplished thus far.

### 1.3 Information by the outgoing BFUG Co-Chairs (Spain and Georgia)

Maia Shukhoshvili (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair, Georgia) welcomed everyone to the meeting. She recounted the Board meeting in Tbilisi, and concluded by expressing her best wishes to the current and incoming BFUG Co-Chairs.

## 2. Adoption of the Agenda

Upon the request of the Vice-Chair, the order of agenda items 7 and 8, which pertain to the information on the Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum, was rearranged to precede item 6, focusing on the discussion of the draft BFUG agenda. The proposed change received approval, and the agenda was subsequently adopted with the adjusted order.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 2.1 Draft Agenda](#)  
[BFUG Board BE VA 87 2.2 Draft Annotated Agenda](#)

## 3. Update from the BFUG Secretariat, including update on the call for the host of the 2027 EHEA Ministerial Conference

Edlira Subashi (Head of BFUG Secretariat) provided updates since the previous BFUG meeting. Key points included ongoing collaboration and coordination with BFUG Chairs, along with support for the BFUG Working Structures, as well as a detailed outline of the planned and current workplan of the Working Structures and their respective substructures. As part of preparations for the Ministerial Conference, it was communicated that the Head of Secretariat had been nominated to be part of the Albanian working group responsible for the conference's preparations. She shared information about the Save the Date and preliminary details for the Ministerial Conference sent to BFUG. In February, the Secretariat is planning to request information from the BFUG to facilitate the official invitation from the Ministry of Education of Albania.

Two newsletters were created and shared with the BFUG, developed in collaboration with the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community (TF on EKS). Further, it was informed that, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, an expressing interest letter from the Ministry of Education of Moldova was received in which Moldova announced its interest on co-organizing with Romania the next Ministerial Conference in 2027 and hosting the BFUG Secretariat. Given that in the call for expression launched in May 2023 the letter's deadline to be circulated among the BFUG fell on 22 February 2024, i.e., only two days after the first BFUG Meeting in February, the Secretariat asked the BFUG Board to consider a date change to circulate the letter earlier. If accepted, both Romania and Moldova would be notified in time for the presentation to reach the BFUG



Secretariat two weeks before the meeting, aligning with the deadline for all Working Structures. It was requested that the letter of interest be circulated to the BFUG.

A question arose regarding the collaboration between the Secretariat and the TF on EKS and a possible duplication of tasks. The inquiry encompassed tasks such as creating newsletters, establishing a social media presence, and determining the content to be communicated. Questions were raised about the utility of these initiatives and whether feedback had been received on their effectiveness. The Head of the Secretariat conveyed that the TF on EKS Action Plan includes the Secretariat's involvement in the social media aspect and the development of the newsletter. Concerning social media accounts, she mentioned that information is published about BFUG, Board and Working Structures' meetings. Regarding the newsletter, she explained that the Secretariat was assigned, as per the Action Plan, to lay out the newsletter and approach BFUG for contributions to its content. EUA suggested that BFUG should engage in a discussion with regards to the newsletter, as the Secretariat's involvement in such tasks was not initially anticipated and that these responsibilities are not typically part of the Secretariat's usual tasks. ESU highlighted the need for clear guidelines on the use of newsletters and social media. The TF on EKS Co-Chair explained that the Secretariat's involvement and support for the creation of the newsletter was approved in the TF EKS Action Plan, and was focused on providing support exclusively for layout and design of the newsletter. It was decided to discuss the continuation of the newsletter in the upcoming BFUG meeting.

The Council of Europe (CoE) expressed appreciation to the work of the Secretariat and the initiatives undertaken, and conveyed that for the future working period, the workplan ought to be more compact, in order to streamline activities more effectively. The Holy See Co-Chair expressed concerns about numerous conflicting meetings, noting an unprecedented number of meetings and scheduling conflicts during the working period due to groups managing their own schedules. It was suggested centralizing meeting scheduling with the Secretariat to prevent scheduling conflicts and ensure BFUG delegates' active participation in Working Structures rather than relying solely on experts, as brought up by several Board members.

Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair underscored the significance of organizing a clear workplan when arranging the BFUG Working Structures for the upcoming working period. It was also highlighted that exceeding the planned number of meetings or forming additional subgroups beyond the Terms of Reference should not anticipate support from the Secretariat. The CoE proposed collecting statistics on member country participation (including geographical distribution) in Working Structure meetings to assess potential disparities and explore opportunities for rationalizing the number and topics of these structures. The Secretariat confirmed that they are currently working on this initiative and that the results will be included in the final report, which will be presented at the BFUG meeting in April.

Romania, in coordination with Moldova, affirmed their intention to present at the upcoming BFUG meeting their interest for hosting in the next working period, if decided by the BFUG.

The Holy See Co-Chair concluded by proposing that the Task Force on the Review of the Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA focus on incorporating more detailed provisions into the Rules of Procedure regarding guidelines for conducting work within the BFUG, given that Iceland had recalled the standard of two meetings per year or one per semester as a rule for working structures, and introducing a mechanism for linking the creation of further subgroups to a BFUG endorsement. She underlined, in a more general perspective, that it should be avoided that project-based funding leads to diverging deadlines between the ToR-obligations and the project related ones.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 3.1 BFUG Secretariat Presentation](#)

#### **4. Final reports from the Working Groups and Task Forces**

##### **4.1 Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)**

Helga Posset (Co-Chair, BICG) provided an update on the meetings held underscoring the effective collaboration within the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) on various subjects. While acknowledging the existing gap in implementing the Key Commitments (KCs) within the EHEA, the BICG recommended that countries



devise a shared implementation plan for the upcoming working period. The BICG Co-Chair emphasized the need for increased commitment from countries to address the implementation gap, urging them to assess their progress, identify areas requiring attention, and explore opportunities for mutual support. The proposal for the Drafting Committee highlighted the BICG's objective for tangible commitment from countries regarding the three KCs. The challenge of insufficient coordination among TPG representatives and their ministries was underscored, emphasizing the pivotal importance of clear mandates for TPG representatives to ensure effective progress in implementing KCs.

The discussion included the BICG's commitment to continuing its work in the next period, concentrating on evaluations of the TPGs' work and added value, and refinements to existing tools. While the proposals for the Communiqué were regarded as being too detailed for complete inclusion, the BICG Co-Chairs were encouraged to formulate guidelines on addressing the implementation gap more concretely, and to evaluate the added value of the peer group approach. Support was voiced for the BICG's proposal of a publishable implementation plan for countries, with consideration for its applicability to various topics beyond KCs. A pragmatic approach was suggested, beginning with the clearly defined KCs and later expanding the plan to cover additional policy areas.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 1 BICG Update](#)

#### 4.2 Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process

Una Strand Viðarsdóttir, on behalf of the WG on Monitoring Co-Chairs, provided an update on the progress of the implementation report since the BFUG meeting in Madrid. There, BFUG members offered comments on the draft report and provided clarifications to questionnaire responses. The authors are actively addressing all received comments, with a specific focus on concerns raised by several countries regarding two indicators in the key commitment chapter and the approach to indicators in the social dimension chapter. The key commitment indicators will be discussed in the upcoming WG on Monitoring meeting on 14 February 2024 and presented at the BFUG. The social dimension approach was also discussed in a consultation with concerned countries and the WG on SD Co-Chairs on 10 January 2024. A pre-final version of the report will be circulated to the BFUG, and an executive summary will be shared before the February BFUG meeting if deemed suitable for discussion based on the Board considerations.

#### 4.3 Working Group on Fundamental Values

Una Strand Viðarsdóttir, on behalf of the Co-Chairs of the WG on Fundamental Values, shared that the WG is scheduled to conduct a meeting on 24 January 2024, marking one final meeting before the conclusion of the current working period. Comments received on the academic integrity statement will be addressed during this specific meeting. The primary focus at present revolves around the draft framework, which has been presented in the circulated report.

The CoE inquired if members could bring a clear mandate for the approval of statements to the BFUG meeting. Addressing the complexity of the framework, the CoE sought clarification on the negotiation process among member states for the approval of the monitoring framework across different dimensions and the associated deadline. Additionally, proposals were put forth for the group's continuation post-monitoring, raising questions about potential new tasks, roles, and the composition of the group, emphasizing the need for a coherent structure, whether through member states participating in monitoring groups or the establishment of an independent monitoring expert group with external experts facilitating a dialogue with member states. It was explained that the framework would undergo a pilot phase in four countries in the coming months. The need to discuss whether every monitored country should be part of a monitoring group could be scheduled as a discussion for the BFUG meeting in February. It was added that, as the statements have been circulated to the BFUG, approval could also be sought during the BFUG meeting in February. EUA proposed the possibility of organizing a webinar or meeting to present the monitoring framework and discuss it during the BFUG meetings in February or April.

The Drafting Committee Co-Chair requested that a WG document intended for annexation to the Communiqué be presented to the next BFUG meeting in February, given that it is not practice to annex full WG reports.



Speaking as BFUG Co-Chair, she also suggested that the WG start to prepare the Terms of Reference for the next working period, which could begin to be discussed in the upcoming BFUG meeting in February.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 3 WG FV Report](#)

#### 4.4 Working Group on Social Dimension

Ninoslav S. Schmidt (Co-Chair, WG on SD) gave an overview of the WG on SD's progress on the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) for the social dimension in the EHEA. He highlighted that approximately 42% of principles had been implemented in national systems, indicating room for improvement in the upcoming period. The Co-Chair mentioned ongoing efforts to refine the indicators and explanatory descriptors, emphasizing their non-prescriptive nature. This approach allows EHEA countries to implement them according to their national higher education systems, fostering European and national-level monitoring and evaluation of the principles for the social dimension. The development process involved extensive consultation, spanning 12 cycles and 20 iterations. Following feedback from the Madrid BFUG meeting, the WG on SD Co-Chairs convened with Nordic countries, Germany, Belgium, Holy See, and Eurydice on 10 January 2024 to gather further input. A new version of the document was prepared, highlighting the "toolbox approach" and flexibility in the use of principles, guidelines, and indicators. Countries were invited to submit written comments by the end of January, with the WG aiming to finalize the document for the February BFUG meeting. The Co-Chair emphasized the goal of adopting the document as a standalone endorsed by ministers, providing a clear reference to its adoption in the Communiqué.

There was a request for the report to emphasize the evolution of the PAG document from the BFUG meeting in Madrid to the upcoming one. Additionally, there was a call for clarity regarding the title, authorship, and document layout presentation at the next BFUG meeting.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 WG SD 4 4 1 Principles, Guidelines, Indicators](#)  
[BFUG Board BE VA 87 WG SD 4 4 2 Report](#); [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 4 3 WG SD Presentation](#)

#### 4.5 Working Group on Learning & Teaching

John Edwards (EURASHE) conveyed that there had been no updates from the WG Co-Chairs since the last BFUG meeting. He acknowledged the WG's work on the three Peer Learning Activities and associated indicators. He pointed out a lack of communication among the Co-Chairs, emphasizing the need for institutional responsibilities when an entity takes on the role of Co-Chair. He highlighted challenges like the lack of funding for the WG and questioned the sustainability of a group without financial support. He suggested exploring funding options for the next cycle, not only for this WG but for others facing similar challenges. In response, the European Commission (EC) explained that funding for WGs depends on submitted projects through an open call aligned with the priorities of the Communiqué. They mentioned plans for a more open call in the next cycle and encouraged all WGs to apply for funding.

#### 4.6 Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue

Ann Katherine Isaacs (Co-Chair, CG on GPD) updated on the CG's activities and its subgroups. The regional subgroups have engaged in various activities within their macro-regions, and have produced lists of proposed invitees for the Forum which have been reviewed by the Albanian Authorities. Regarding functional subgroups, the Global Policy Statement subgroup has produced a Draft 4 statement, presented to the Board, that includes a number of topics that the CG has indicated as being useful for discussion with other macro regions and organizations. The CG suggested organizing dialogues and meetings on common interests between global interlocutors and BFUG Working Structures. These interactions have included sessions with the Co-chairs of the Social Dimension and the Institute for Evidence-based Change (IEBC) in the USA, as well as discussions among TPG B and C during the Joint HAQAA and CG on GPD meeting.

The proposed strategy for the Global Policy Forum (GPF) involves implementing a "sandwich model" meeting, where the Forum would be embedded within the Ministerial Conference on the morning of 30 May 2024. Apart from sessions designated for 'closed doors' discussions by the EHEA Ministers, global guests would participate



as observers throughout the Ministerial proceedings.

It was emphasized that the standing practice of the BFUG is to be consulted on the list of countries to be invited before the invitations are sent, respecting the foreign policy decisions of the hosting country. Further, regarding the GPF draft statement, it was decided to agree on written feedback within a week.

The WG on SD requested a dedicated session on the social dimension at the GPF, noting increased interest globally in the evolution of the social dimension in the EHEA. They sought guidance on proposing invitations for global organizations.

#### 4.6.1. Information related to the Bologna Global Policy Forum

Linda Pustina (Vice-Chair and CG on GPD Co-Chair) outlined the agenda for the GPF, providing logistical details and organizational aspects. A decision on whether the tour de table presentations should be conducted in person or compiled, contingent on participant numbers, remains pending. She also underscored the capacity available for hosting four breakout sessions.

Following discussions with the Albanian Authorities, heads of delegations are expected to occupy the first row of the table in the plenary room, if it will be a round table set up, which has a capacity of 75 positions for ministers and GPF participants. With the CG on GPD proposing to invite 10 countries and 10 organizations per region initially, totaling 60, and considering all EHEA country delegations, the potential number of delegations could reach up to 127, posing logistical challenges. Various options were explored in the CG on GPD, including having certain EHEA delegations and others among non-EHEA delegations in the main room, seeking guidance from the BFUG Board to establish a specific number for EHEA countries' participation. Other options included ensuring equal treatment for all delegations in parallel rooms or organizing the entire GPF exclusively through breakout sessions. The proposal to segregate 75 delegations into the main room and others into a separate room was dismissed by the Albanian Authorities due to concerns about unequal treatment.

It was conveyed that the list of countries for invitation was shared with and reviewed by the Albanian Authorities in December. Any concerns or comments from the BFUG are anticipated within a specified deadline once the list is shared with the BFUG.

ESU sought clarification on the international organizations contacted for the GPF and endorsed EUA's suggestion for an online BFUG consultation as an initial step to discuss the list of invited countries. They recommended incorporating sustainability into the sessions, either through a dedicated session or integration into existing ones. ESU emphasized the necessity of finding a solution for ensuring the presence of all heads of delegation in the main room during the forum. Additionally, they underscored the importance of specifying eligible organizations to speak during the GPF, a detail not explicitly addressed in the document.

A remark was made emphasizing that the sandwich model aims to increase the participation of EHEA members; hence, restricting the involvement of EHEA countries at the GPF was considered inappropriate. A proposal to rearrange the main hall into a theatre format was considered and approved as a feasible option by the host country.

It was suggested to have a proposal by the CG on GPD Co-Chairs on which organizations to invite, and on topic proposals for breakout sessions submitted to BFUG delegations formally for their possible objections, to be then further discussed in the upcoming BFUG meeting. It was also decided that the list of countries and organizations to be invited at the GPF would be circulated to the BFUG to give the possibility for possible diplomatic objections or additions by 4 February 2024. Another key point emphasized was the need of a presentation of detailed logistics information and concrete decisions regarding the setup of the Ministerial Conference and GPF during the BFUG meeting in February 2024.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 6 1 CG GPD Presentation](#)  
[BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 6 2 CG GPD Draft Statement EHEA Global Policy Forum](#)

#### 4.7 Working Group on San Marino Roadmap

Maija Innola (Co-Chair, WG on SMR) underlined that the only remaining task is for San Marino to make final



updates on the implementation if required. Furthermore, she indicated that the WG has formulated a new proposal for the DC concerning the Communiqué text, preserving the fundamental concept but with modified language. She confirmed that the revised text would be forwarded to the DC subsequent to the Board meeting.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 7 WG SMR Final Report](#)

#### 4.8 Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge-Sharing in the EHEA community

Daniela Cristina Ghitulica (Co-Chair, TF on EKS) informed that the TF report and draft recommendations were presented at the last BFUG meeting. The report includes an introductory section detailing the group's work and various annexes containing communication tools aligned with their action plan. She highlighted progress, including a survey on stakeholders' perceptions of the EHEA, with the draft report ready for review. Preliminary findings suggest a generally positive perception of the Bologna process's impact, with some criticisms regarding the goals and implementation of the process. She underlined the need for intensified efforts in knowledge sharing, discussions on EHEA tools, and exploration of additional topics within the Bologna process.

Concerning recommendations, she outlined three main points: preparing and publishing a national plan with a focus on knowledge sharing, establishing national Bologna expert teams and/or hubs with sustainable funding, and creating a coordination group within the BFUG.

Additionally, she mentioned a video produced related to the Bologna Process in collaboration with the EUA. The Co-Chair also stated the proposal for a plenary session at the next BFUG meeting, as well as having a press corner and conducting interviews for a video documenting BFUG's activities. She also discussed plans for the Ministerial Conference, including the celebration of 25 years of the Bologna process. The contribution to the Communiqué was revised to include the action plan and a significant recommendation regarding the establishment of expert networks supporting knowledge sharing and Bologna policy implementation at the national and international levels.

Belgium French Community Co-Chair requested a written request by the TF on EKS on their wish regarding mobilizing break-out sessions during Brussels BFUG, as well as their technical needs by the end of the week. They would also inform the TF if it's possible to arrange a media corner, and suggested that a concept note be provided by the TF to the BFUG to outline the media corner project.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 8 TF EKS Update](#)

#### 4.9 Task Force on the Review of the Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA

Michael Gaebel (Co-Chair, TF on RR) provided an overview of the documents prepared. For the upcoming BFUG meeting, a revised version of the rules of procedure will be presented along with a document explaining the revision process and highlighting pending content issues. One unresolved matter is the exemption of certain issues from voting, which they hope to address through focused discussions. Regarding the Secretariat document, the TF RR Co-Chair mentioned revising the document after discussions in the BFUG Meeting in Madrid. He emphasized that focus is now on one option: establishing a new legal entity, possibly an NGO. Additionally, they explored the option of establishing a foundation that wouldn't require membership. A call to BFUG members will be proposed after the Tirana Ministerial Conference to host the Secretariat. The revised concept note includes a draft roadmap for establishing the Secretariat by 2027, suggesting steps to be taken starting with the Tirana Ministerial Conference. Lastly, a briefing document was proposed for sharing within administrations, that aims to provide information to ministries.

Belgium French Community Co-Chair raised a query regarding the suggestions for the future structure of the Secretariat. They sought clarification on how comments made by the CoE and other delegations have been taken on board, emphasizing the need to understand all propositions.

Holy See Co-Chair made a point of order highlighting factual inaccuracies in both the draft revised concept note and the draft briefing note. They noted that the statements claiming the support of the majority of BFUG members for the setup of a longer-term Secretariat were misleading, as less than half of the present delegations had taken the floor, and one could not draw conclusions on the position of the silent majority, and



requested their removal or rewording, also to reflect the consensus-seeking nature of BFUG discussions.

The BICG Co-Chair questioned a statement in the draft briefing note regarding the relationship between a lack of implementation of key commitments and the establishment of a permanent secretariat, seeking clarification on the connection between the two.

The Vice-Chair raised concerns about enforcement measures if a country fails to pay the fee for the permanent Secretariat or disagrees with its establishment. They questioned the legal relationship between the NGO serving as the Secretariat and the BFUG, seeking clarification on how this relationship would be regulated.

ESU expressed support for exploring both NGO and foundation options for the Secretariat, raising a concern about the clarity regarding the composition and function of the Secretariat governing board. Regarding the rules of procedure, ESU emphasized the need for specificity, cautioning against overly generic language that might lead to ambiguity or the loss of key provisions. They also raised questions about the adoption and enforcement of new rules and expressed a desire to retain essential elements of the current rules. Regarding voting arrangements and membership criteria, ESU highlighted the need to address systemic issues and ensure the preservation of existing provisions.

The CG on GPD Co-Chair noted that the Secretariat responsibilities outlined in the document are tasks currently handled by the BFUG working structures, adding that this could significantly alter its current collaborative nature and potentially transform it into a distinct international organization with its own operational procedures. She underlined the preoccupation with the fundamental change in the role and managing of the EHEA if it became a membership organisation.

The EC expressed acknowledgment of the challenges with the rotating Secretariat and emphasized the necessity for a more permanent structure. However, they clarified that the concept for the Secretariat is not intended to be included in the Communiqué, but rather to receive conceptual approval at the ministerial level. They emphasized the need for administrative support that is stable in the long term, highlighting that the exact modalities and funding mechanisms will be discussed subsequently. The EC suggested that discussions on issues such as membership fees can be addressed once the concept is approved, indicating that potential solutions, such as EC support for membership fees, could be explored.

The CoE clarified that their proposal on co-hosting the Secretariat with the EC was presented informally and depended on the decision-making process within their Education committee. They urged for precision in the documents regarding their proposal and expressed concerns about premature decisions regarding a permanent Secretariat and voting procedures to be presented to the Ministers. Further, they emphasized the importance of adhering to the TF's mandate, that is to provide recommendations for reforms in the EHEA. They highlighted that the BFUG should receive these recommendations before deciding on any reforms to be included in the Ministerial Conference.

The WG on SMR Co-Chair highlighted an inaccuracy in the rules and procedures document regarding San Marino's membership status within the EHEA, requesting that it be rectified prior to the BFUG meeting.

The necessity of deciding on the establishment of a more permanent Secretariat was emphasized by the TF on RR Co-Chair, prompting the proposal to initiate a dialogue within the BFUG to assess support for the concept of a permanent secretariat as a preliminary step for future discussions.

Regarding the Rules of Procedure, the Holy See Co-Chair reiterated that legally, there is no distinction between decisions made by ministers and those made by the BFUG. They stressed that all representatives, whether ministers or BFUG members, speak on behalf of their entities, constituting the same body. The Holy See urged reconsideration of dividing the rules into branches, highlighting that legally, there is no possibility to differentiate, as it poses significant legal complications and just produced repetitions. They underscored the importance of considering the legal aspects and expressed the expectation to have the revised rules reviewed by a legal expert in international public law before they are presented to the BFUG.

The Vice Chair raised concerns about the document circulated, highlighting the lack of clarity regarding the establishment of a permanent Secretariat. She stressed the importance of formulating a clear proposal for





ministers to consider, and she suggested discussing in the BFUG a reformulated proposal including the topic of fees and key details that ensure clarity on the terms and timeline for establishing the permanent Secretariat. The concise proposal would facilitate BFUG representatives in presenting it to their respective ministers for decision-making, considering the challenge of summarizing lengthy documents provided by the TF on RR. This approach aligns closely with the EC proposal to prioritize agreement on fundamental concepts.

The TF on RR Co-Chair clarified that the preferred approach for the Communiqué would involve the ministers tasking the BFUG with establishing the permanent Secretariat. He emphasized the importance of developing the rules and details of the Secretariat before bringing them to the ministers. While the TF has not yet consulted a lawyer on the documents, they assured that it's in progress and would involve someone familiar with the BFUG. Regarding concerns about potential changes within the BFUG, he indicated that the Secretariat's role might become more demanding but not change fundamentally as it would primarily serve as a technical support entity for the BFUG. Discussing the challenges with the Rules of Procedure, he emphasized the need to strike a balance between detail and conciseness. He suggested addressing detailed aspects in a separate document to streamline the Rules of Procedure. However, due to time constraints, he noted that developing such a document was beyond the TF's current scope. The issue of the BFUG Board and Co-Chairs remained unresolved, but he expressed readiness to revisit it at the BFUG meeting. Regarding the remark from the CoE, he expressed readiness to revisit the option if requested. Additionally, he posed a query regarding the document presented at the BFUG Meeting in Madrid, highlighting that an email correspondence had been delivered to the BFUG requesting the exclusion of the section pertaining to the Council of Europe. He proposed adding a footnote to clarify the disagreement with the presentation of the Council of Europe's part. On the topic of membership, he highlighted various solutions and noted that funding did not seem to be a significant obstacle, as most members who spoke expressed willingness to contribute financially.

Concluding, the Holy See Co-Chair emphasized the need for the TF on RR to determine if a significant amount of time should be allocated during the upcoming BFUG Meeting to address the presented questions. She queried the TF on RR about their intended approach with the document. Additionally, she urged to develop a more concise briefing note aligned with the TF on RR Terms of Reference, catering to countries seeking a condensed version that could be used to brief ministerial decision-making level. This streamlined document would facilitate delegations in presenting information to their ministries more efficiently, ensuring a mandate for substantive discussions during the BFUG meeting.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 9 1 TF RR Issues for information and discussion](#); [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 9 2 TF RR Concept note Permanent EHEA Secretariat](#); [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 9 3 TF RR Draft Briefing Note Permanent Secretariat](#); [BFUG Board BE VA 87 4 9 4 TF RR Suggestion for the Tirana Communiqué](#)

## 5. Drafting Committee for the Tirana 2024 Ministerial Communiqué

Melanie Rosenbaum (Co-Chair, DC) introduced the revised draft Communiqué, highlighting that the DC had restarted the document from scratch following the BFUG Madrid meeting and incorporated feedback, resulting in a 25% reduction in length. She explained that green sections indicate areas where technical information needs to be added based on comments, while yellow sections indicate decisions pending BFUG approval before finalizing the wording. She invited urgent feedback on the draft by January 28<sup>th</sup>, in order to be discussed in the upcoming DC meeting scheduled for the days after.

A discrepancy in the terminology regarding thematic peer groups was noted, suggesting a change from "peer learning groups" to "thematic peer groups." Additionally, there was a clarification regarding the ECTS, highlighting its incorporation of both student workload and learning outcomes, along with transparency tools like course catalogs. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the mentioned mobility targets do not align with those outlined in the Rome Communiqué. While the document discusses measures for greener and more inclusive mobility, it was emphasized that adherence to the Rome Communiqué's targets, including a 100% mobility target for international learning experiences, is crucial, whether physical, virtual, or through internationalization at home.



The EC suggested phrasing the statement "nearly 50 members," considering it somewhat misleading, and questioned the inclusion of mobility targets, noting that while there had been discussions on mobility during previous BFUG meetings, no decision had been made regarding maintaining the 20% target. Additionally, they brought attention to certain topics that had not received sufficient discussion, suggesting that these issues be thoroughly addressed at the upcoming BFUG meeting. They suggested to consider in an annex the fundamental values statements.

Given the Communiqué's emphasis on future opportunities and tackling emerging challenges, the CoE stressed the necessity of broadening the discussions within the Bologna Process and the importance of introducing new topics. Additionally, they suggested restructuring the text to ensure coherence, proposing to consolidate all actions in the third part following objectives and strategies. On the matter of amendments, the CoE emphasized the significance of transparent communication, advocating for the notification of all members regarding any presented amendments.

The Holy See Co-Chair clarified that the CoE has the option to offer feedback regarding the introduction or exclusion of specific elements. Regarding the amendment process, she explained that the DC produces a compromise version, and any amendments are subsequently made in the BFUG.

ESU expressed the need for improvement in the area of learning and teaching, particularly focusing on emerging topics like artificial intelligence and on delivery methods such as micro-credentials. Regarding mobility targets, they emphasized that while a higher target may be desirable, it's essential to address resource constraints and improve the mobility system to achieve meaningful change. They also stressed the importance of maintaining a distinction between physical mobility and virtual cooperation, noting that the essence of mobility lies in physical movement. Additionally, ESU highlighted the need for forward-looking aspects in the Communiqué, acknowledging the current version's limitations in addressing these concerns. They emphasized the importance of discussing concrete measures at both national and Bologna levels. However, they pointed out the challenge of decision-making processes within the BFUG. As a result, consensus-building and compromise become crucial in shaping the direction of discussions and decisions. EURASHE stressed the importance of the brain drain, seen as a challenge of mobility.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 5 DC Draft 1.0 Tirana Communiqué](#)

## **6. Information related to the Ministerial Conference**

Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice-Chair) presented the draft agenda for the Ministerial Conference. An important consideration raised was whether the Ministerial Conference would also be open for delegations from the GPF to attend. The Vice Chair emphasized the need for clarity on this matter to properly organize the delegation setup, allocate special places, and provide parallel rooms for observer delegations. However, the decision rests with BFUG members on whether the GPF delegations can be present during the Ministerial Conference.

The main room has a capacity for 400 participants, with three additional parallel rooms set up in a theatre format for breakout sessions. The possibility of additional setups was mentioned, contingent on the number of places required for the breakout sessions. Rooms for bilateral meetings on the second day could be prepared.

A logistical question was posed to the Board regarding the scheduling of the BFUG meeting in relation to the Ministerial Conference. Specifically, it was queried whether the BFUG meeting will take place on the same day before the Ministerial or the day before. For the Ministerial Conference, the Save the Date has been sent, and invitations along with full practical information and registration details, will follow.

Several members mentioned challenges in positioning the second and third topics of the parallel sessions (presented by the Vice-Chair) in relation to the ongoing themes and discussions within the BFUG, its working structures, and the draft Communiqué. While they align with the EU skills agenda, uncertainty was expressed about their fit within the EHEA work program. It was suggested further elaboration on this point for discussion in the BFUG.

A remark was made, considering the presence of non-EHEA partners, about the second theme, "fostering a European mindset," suggesting potential reformulation if participants beyond the EHEA are involved.



Additionally, a proposal was made to invite independent academic communities from Belarus, considering student unions and academic staff in exile committed to the Bologna process.

Potential suggestions for the topics to be discussed in the Ministerial Conference included discussions on how BICG commitments would be achieved in practice (key commitments, and showcasing the work of the TPG); the concerns of the Task Force; fundamental values; the social dimension; and the relevance of higher education and research for society. It was noted the need to align discussions closer to the EHEA agenda, while acknowledging the potential for new sessions if prioritized by the BFUG in the next cycle, emphasizing the need for well-prepared new discussions with a strong connection to EHEA objectives. It was also emphasized the importance of focusing discussions on topics closely related to past and future EHEA initiatives, aligning with the collective objectives and accomplishments of this working period.

Concerns were raised about potential lack of ministerial ownership regarding the Communiqué and future work program, especially if focusing on previously unaddressed topics. It was emphasized that ministers need to actively participate in debates, provide input into the Communiqué, and have a sense of ownership over the process and future endeavours.

Clarification was sought on the format expected for the ministerial conference, whether it involves an open-ended discussion on the Communiqué and future priorities or focuses on predetermined concrete topics. Regarding the timing of the BFUG meeting, it was proposed to be decided at the BFUG meeting on the most suitable time to convene, whether before or on the day of the Ministerial.

The Vice-Chair addressed a specific point about the European mindset, noting its relevance to the EHEA and Albania's priorities. She asked that written topic proposals be sent within five days for timely consideration by the ministry, to prepare a new document.

## **7. Discussion of the Draft Agenda for the Upcoming BFUG Meeting LXXXVIII**

Caroline Hollela (BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium French Community) outlined the draft agenda for the upcoming BFUG meeting, noting that each item contained specified discussion or decision points. She stressed the importance of BFUG working structures preparing presentations beforehand, specifying discussion topics, and indicating the time needed for reporting and asked for the confirmation of the WG-co chairs regarding this proposal of time allocation. An essential point of discussion would revolve around updating the current BFUG workplan roadmap and assessing the impact of the report on the future workplan and BFUG structures.

Regarding thematic discussions, options included forgoing them and continuing discussions on the TF on RR; deliberating the future of the Bologna process; or ensuring thorough preparation and document review rather than introducing new themes at this stage. The BICG Co-Chair advocated for a thematic discussion, allowing TPGs to showcase their achievements in the upcoming BFUG meeting, the April BFUG meeting, or potentially at the Ministerial Conference. The TF EKS Co-Chair supported the thematic discussion, proposing a merger of the TF reporting and introduction into the plenary session. She suggested using only breakout sessions and eliminating the follow-up session at the start of the second day, acknowledging the challenges faced by the TF on EKS in presenting their progress in previous meetings.

It was urged to finalize key working structure documents for the Tirana Ministerial Conference during the February BFUG meeting, emphasizing the need for clear conclusions on these agenda items. A revisit to the Ad Hoc Task Force on Increasing the Synergies among the ERA-EEA-EHEA was proposed, with a focus on potential issues to be addressed in the Communiqué. The Ad Hoc TF Co-Chairs had been requested to report back on relevant elements by the DC, however no additional information was received.

A recommendation was put forward to rearrange the agenda by placing the item on the 'Update of the current BFUG workplan roadmap and repercussions of the reports on the future work plan and BFUG structures' after the Task Force on Review of Rules and Regulations, so that it is discussed upon completion of all the reporting from the working structures.

It was suggested to address the Communiqué paragraph per paragraph during the upcoming BFUG (rather than "tour de table").



The BFUG Co-Chairs would review and discuss the proposals, preparing a revised agenda to be shared with the BFUG.

For more information, please see: [BFUG Board BE VA 87 6 1 Draft BFUG Meeting Agenda](#)

## **8. Information on the next meetings**

### **8.1. BFUG Board Meeting, Holy See (12 March 2024)**

Melanie Rosenbaum (BFUG Co-Chair, Holy See) informed that the essential information for the upcoming Board meeting in March 2024 will be provided to the Board members in due time.

### **8.2. BFUG Meeting Belgium (11-12 April 2024)**

Caroline Hollela (BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium French Community) conveyed that the save-the-date for the BFUG meeting in April, along with the registration link, has been sent to the BFUG. She also mentioned that the EQAR General Assembly is scheduled for Friday afternoon. The Co-Chair concluded by extending a warm welcome to everyone for the upcoming BFUG meetings to take place in Brussels in February and April 2024.

### **8.3. BFUG Board Meeting Iceland (Incoming Co-Chair)**

Una Strand Viðarsdóttir (Incoming Co-Chair, Iceland) indicated that preparations for the Board meeting will be aligned with the schedule of the BFUG, pending coordination with the Incoming Co-Chair from Hungary.

### **8.4. BFUG Meeting Hungary (Incoming Co-Chair)**

András Báló (Incoming Co-Chair, Hungary) shared that although the program has yet to be approved, preparations for the BFUG meeting in the next working period are aimed for November. The Holy See Co-Chair recommended considering a potential shift in the BFUG meeting schedule to October or early November, given the Ministerial Conference is already in May 2024.

## **9. AOB**

The BFUG Co-Chairs informed that they would introduce an updated version of the Brno roadmap at the next BFUG meeting, to provide a comprehensive overview of pending tasks and potentially serve as a template for future actions.

S.E. Mons. Paul Tighe (Holy See) expressed gratitude for the great level of cooperation, and concluded by extending an invitation to the members for the upcoming Board meeting on 12 March 2024.