



Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

## Working Group on Fundamental Values

Eighth Meeting  
Bucharest, Romania  
7-8 November 2023

Minutes of meeting

### List of participants

Country/Organization	Name	Last Name
Austria	Milica	Popović
Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
Croatia*	Leonardo	Marušić
European Commission - DG EAC	Svein	Hullstein
ESU	Iris	Kimizoglu
EUA	Monika	Steinel
Finland	Maija	Innola
Germany (Co-Chair)	David	Akrami Flores
Holy See*	Melanie	Rosenbaum
Iceland	Una	Strand Viðarsdóttir
Malta*	Rose Anne	Cuschieri
The Netherlands*	Sophie	Duijser
Norway*	Tone	Flood Strøm
Poland	Ewa Agnieszka	Lekka-Kowalik
Romania (Co-Chair)	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
Sweden	Robin	Moberg
Switzerland*	Aurélia	Robert-Tissot
Turkey*	Aslı	Günay
NewFAV Project Guest - King's College London	Liviu	Matei
NewFAV Project Guest - Public Policy Management Institute (PPMI), Lithuania	Elizaveta	Potapova
NewFAV Project Guest - Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, Twente, Netherlands	Daniela	Craciun
Guest - UEFISCDI	Cristina	Fit
BFUG Secretariat*	Edlira Adi	Kahani Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Jora	Vaso
BFUG Secretariat	Blerina	Caslli

\*Online attendance

\*\*France, Italy, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, United Kingdom, United Kingdom (Scotland), EI -ETUCE ENQA, EURYDICE did not attend the meeting.

### 1. Welcome remarks

Cezar Hâj (Co-Chair, Romania) extended a warm welcome to participants of the Working Group on Fundamental Values (FV WG), highlighting the online presence of co-chairs Tone Flood Strøm (Co-Chair, Norway) and Rose Anne Cuschieri (Co-Chair, Malta). Acknowledging the unplanned shift to a hybrid format, Mr. Hâj emphasized the facilitation of online contributions. He opted to forego introductory formalities in



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order to focus on substantive discussion while underlining the benefit of holding a preceding PLA session that addressed preliminary matters, allowing ample time for vital discussions during the Working Group meeting.

## **2. Introduction and approval of the agenda**

Co-Chair, Romania began with a review of the agenda and went on to address the circulation of the meeting minutes from the last two meetings to the WG. The WG's feedback provided to the Secretariat was acknowledged, and it was confirmed that the revised minutes from March and July, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> meetings, were made available online. Appreciation towards the BFUG Secretariat for the improved style of the recent meeting minutes was expressed, acknowledging the efforts made in enhancing clarity and quality.

The particular significance of this meeting was highlighted, as the working group approaches the end of its mandate, and emphasis was placed on the need to deliver key outcomes to the BFUG.

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

For more information, please see: [WG FV ES GA 8 Agenda](#)

## **3. Updates NewFAV project**

Co-Chair, Romania discussed updates from the NewFAV project, noting that a detailed presentation had been shared the previous day during the PLA. The key update since the last meeting was the successful PLA on student and staff participation in higher education governance, and discussions on the challenges of the monitoring framework developed by the project.

It was noted that the project's schedule does not perfectly align with the Ministerial Conference set for May 2024. Thus, certain project issues are bound to be presented after the Ministerial. It is projected that the project concludes in June with the piloting of the technical monitoring framework expected to start later, resulting in the unavailability of its results for the Ministerial Conference. It was proposed to incorporate the monitoring framework in the working group report, and reference it within the communicate with plans to continue work on it in the next mandate. The discussion on both the ministerial communicate and the framework would be revisited during further deliberations. The efforts of the project team were acknowledged and gratitude was expressed for their continued dedication as the final deliverables are worked on for inclusion in the WG's report.

## **4. Session 1: Update from the BFUG Board**

Co-Chair, Romania announced that, despite the working group's request, the BFUG Board would not accommodate additional FV WG representatives at the BFUG meeting in Madrid. Secondly, the BFUG set a clear date and expectation for all reports to be presented in the BFUG in Madrid. The WG decided that it will present its working draft in Madrid while a final report is planned to be delivered at the BFUG meeting in April 2024. Thirdly, concerns were raised related to the Tirana Communique and the request received from the drafting committee, which commenced work early in the mandate and had requested proposals from all working groups since March 2023. The Drafting Committee Co-Chair, Holy See highlighted that they had already proposed a text for the ministerial communicate, incorporating references to fundamental values. The suggestion was made to discuss the communicate starting from the drafting committee's version, acknowledging their role in crafting the document.

## **5. Session 2: A European Commission project aiming to develop guiding principles on protecting fundamental academic values**



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Svein Hullstein (European Commission - EC) introduced the significance of EC's guiding principles as a concrete action in the European strategy for universities and emphasized its alignment with the higher education goals of the EHEA. The proposal, due by the end of 2024, aims to protect fundamental academic values, is based on the collaborative work of the FV WG and complements efforts in the EHEA, specifically the EC's framework of Action Six, addressing academic freedom in the context of scientific research.

Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe) shared updates on the three consultations done as part of the project. Some conclusions from the institutional level discussions were that fundamental values are the responsibility of leadership, there is a need for awareness among academic community members and improved communication with policymakers, adapting discussion formats to the nature of the issues, and applying Chatham Rules to facilitate open dialogue on sensitive topics. At the national level, suggestions included reviewing legislation, establishing national platforms to report FV violations, and protecting staff and students facing attacks. Regarding the EU level, tricky issues were identified in funding, quality assurance, and international cooperation. An additional concern raised is the necessity, both at the EU and national levels and within university forums, to continually reflect on FVs. There was a call for a robust system of exchange and a plea for the establishment of a monitoring system.

Protection for whistleblowers was discussed. It was noted that this has not specifically featured in the consultation meetings but there has been a focus on individuals who exposed themselves through academic work and that, although these individuals may not be considered whistleblowers, the two groups are connected. Articulating this connection requires careful consideration, both in terms of the level of protection and the national balance between legitimate whistleblowing and possible abuses by institutions.

It was noted that further discussion should focus on how guiding principles can complement, but not duplicate, the work within the EHEA. The concern raised in the discussions is related to ensure that, once adopted, the guidelines do not become static but remain dynamic, actively influencing and shaping the lived reality rather than being disregarded and forgotten.

The EC's framework of Action Six on monitoring academic freedom, the European Parliament's current monitoring initiative involving 27 countries and the Council of Europe possible monitoring of or follow-up on earlier recommendations related to academic freedom and institutional autonomy were brought up. To ensure a cohesive approach, coordination with the European Commission (EC) was recommended for initiatives developed within the EU context. The FV WG plans to organize a meeting involving leaders from various initiatives and frameworks on fundamental values to leverage synergies and prevent duplication of work. While acknowledging some overlap as unavoidable, the suggested approach is to inform the EC about the WG's existing framework, potentially through a meeting in Brussels between the EC and the FV WG.

Concerns were raised about the conceptual variations in the understanding of the FVs among different initiatives. The importance of avoiding dilution of the message was emphasized, highlighting the need to address this challenge in the ongoing work. In moving towards recommendations, it was emphasized that overlap from the EU and EHEA initiatives should be anticipated, but that this is not necessarily problematic. Specifying the WG's role in the next working period was also recommended and the FV WG's importance within the BFUG was highlighted.

## 6. Session 3: Overarching introductory text for the four statements

Co-Chair, Romania presented the draft and emphasized the preference for concrete feedback proposals that could be immediately incorporated into the text. There were very few comments from WG members on the





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draft. As such, the introduction to the annex for the Tirana Communiqué was adopted with minimal edits and was scheduled for presentation at the BFUG in Madrid.

Iris Kimizoglu (ESU) addressed comments on the Academic Integrity statement, which focused mainly on rephrasing and minor adjustments, such as moving certain sections for better flow. The discussion primarily centered on a paragraph rewrite, with some members emphasizing the need for a clear definition of the code of ethics as an obligation. While opinions varied, the WG eventually reached a consensus to approve the statement with specific terms suggested by members. The importance of a well-defined code of ethics was underscored to ensure individuals understand their ethical duties within the institution. Taking into the consideration the changes made, the Academic Integrity statement was adopted and would be included in the document with the other Fundamental Values statements as the Annex to the Tirana Communiqué.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 3 WG FV Introduction and statements](#)

#### **7. Session 4: Ministerial Communiqué reference to fundamental values**

Co-Chair, Romania presented the revised version of the text on fundamental values to become part of the Tirana Communiqué, emphasizing a collaborative approach with the document provided by the drafting committee. Acknowledging the limited time for a detailed review, the group was encouraged to provide feedback on any potential issues or concerns with the proposal.

During the discussion, it was deemed important that the document qualify the Russian attack on Ukraine as unprovoked. Concern was expressed about stating that Fundamental Values (FVs) are more important now than a decade ago, and it was suggested that this reference be removed. Further, issues were raised with the draft's wording that deviates from that of the Rome Communiqué. Consistency in enumerating values was emphasized, with suggestions to maintain the order already established in the Rome Communiqué. It was insisted upon to have all definitions of the FVs in the Communiqué. There was discussion about providing shorter definitions. While this was deemed problematic by some members, it was recommended to follow the model of the Rome Communiqué with a short definition in the text and a more detailed description for each FV in the Annex. It was discussed how Academic Freedom would be included in the text as this fundamental value has been defined already in the Rome Communiqué.

Suggestions were made to use the term "understanding" instead of "definition." The WG revised the text reaffirming the WG's understanding of academic freedom as defined in the Rome Communiqué and outlining the other fundamental values of academic integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, public responsibility for higher education, public responsibility of higher education along with their definitions as understood by the working group with more detailed definitions as part of the Annex to the Tirana Communiqué. This draft was adopted and subsequently shared with the drafting committee and the BFUG.

#### **8. Session 5 & 6: Technical policy framework of indicators for fundamental values**

##### Day 1

Daniela Craciun (NewFAV Project Guest) introduced the NewFAV project team's proposal for a technical framework of monitoring fundamental values, which builds upon mapping existing indicators and assessing their relevance. The team is working on the creation of a piloting methodology for studying country cases with four country pilots scheduled by June 2024. It was highlighted that the goal is to propose a final framework based on this experience by summer 2024.



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The methodology of the monitoring framework was presented, outlining its operationalization for all fundamental values, starting with academic freedom and institutional autonomy. On its implementation, the project's team noted that dimensions were extracted from the definitions of values in the statements and indicators were proposed indicators based on these.

It was explained that the *de jure* monitoring would be done using the traditional Bologna Process Implementation Reports (BPIR) traffic light approach while the *de facto* monitoring would be done in narrative form. The *de jure* monitoring would consider the protection and promotion aspects, the future outlook, infringements and threats, and duties and obligations for each value within the proposed monitoring framework. The outlook component considers positive or negative plans for protection and promotion. For the promotion and protection aspects, self-reporting by public authorities was suggested, with cross-checking from national experts, an open platform, and selected stakeholders. Using existing data sources, such as Eurydice and EUA scorecard was discussed, along with an open platform for stakeholders to contribute. The *de facto* monitoring includes a narrative report on positive developments, threats, and infringements, utilizing sources like the Scholars at Risk database and news reports.

The outlook function was singled out as an innovative aspect of this monitoring framework, as it allows unfulfilled objectives to be assessed in the next monitoring phase and thus helps ensure comparative results over time. However, potential limitations in using the traffic light system to represent legislative reforms were brought up, noting that such reforms may occur slowly, leading to a predominance of yellow or orange ratings for many countries. It was clarified that the outlook compares the present situation rather than an ideal one and that the approach is not punitive, taking into account positive and negative changes in each country's legislation. It was also recommended that clear provisions should be placed regarding promises, so that if a commitment is made and not fulfilled by the monitoring phase, this should be duly noted. In addition, a development assessed as promising in one report cannot be assessed as promising in the following report. The report would note either than the stipulated action has been undertaken or that the expectations have not been met.

Regarding the open platform, it was proposed as part of the project timeline, providing a voice to system-level public authorities and experts. The idea is to collect initial input, cross-check and calibrate data, and then present preliminary results on the platform for public scrutiny and feedback, potentially extending the timeline by two months for a thorough review. There was a suggestion to defer the implementation of the online platform, considering it for further development due to challenges in timely execution within the current working period. It was clarified that this platform is not part of the initial monitoring, but could serve as a test to identify potential threats not captured by traditional monitoring efforts and that the monitoring framework will be refined with the pilot. It was clarified that the framework is set up to monitor commitments, not values. The difficulty in operationalizing some commitments was also noted. It was also clarified that the results of the monitoring exercise will be in the shape of country profiles, and not country measurements for each indicator.

Options were discussed regarding the entity responsible for the monitoring process, considering Eurydice with additional resources, a one-time consortium of organizations selected either by Eurydice or the BFUG, or an independent contractor selected through tender. Emphasis was placed on the operational and financial efficiency of an independent contractor. It was commented that this issue will have to be raised at the BFUG and that the options proposed need to align with the funding body.



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Concerns were raised about the need to carefully consider who would conduct the interpretive work and set up the monitoring framework, given its political significance. The importance of not entirely outsourcing this process to independent entities was underscored. While the actor responsible for monitoring will be decided upon by the BFUG, it was noted several times that Eurydice should be involved, so that its expertise on methodology is used. An advisory body was deemed useful because the framework will be evolving.

The importance of being able to follow developments over time was noted and a concern was raised about starting with only some of the values, suggesting that having a minimum for each value initially would be preferable to avoid signaling varying levels of importance for values. An approach that considers the interplay and synergies among values, when recommendations are adopted, was suggested. It was recommended to strategically plan the implementation of the entire framework in the future and to outline the development process for new indicators and establish a timeline for their creation. Lastly, it was brought up that the European Commission may be interested in becoming involved in the process and develop a report similar to the one on the social dimension. It was decided that this matter would be discussed at an upcoming meeting with the EC.

## Day 2

Elizaveta Potapova (NewFAV Project Guest) continued the second day's presentation on the technical policy framework with academic integrity and student and staff participation, following up on the first day's presentation on academic freedom and autonomy. It was clarified that unlike rights and freedoms, academic integrity is categorized as a duty and obligation type of value and, as such, there is a slight difference in the *de facto* indicators, which gauge the fulfillment of obligations rather than infringements.

The related dimensions were presented along with suggested questions to measure them. It was clarified that when the Eurydice survey was designed, certain definitions and statements, especially regarding academic integrity, were not adequately addressed. As such, the existing questions only partially cover the WG's preferences which do not focus on whether academic integrity is mentioned as a concept, as in the Eurydice report, but on the specific procedures related to it.

For the *de facto* monitoring, the approach to the qualitative narrative part is still under discussion. One suggestion is to include more specific questions related to each *de facto* category of interest. The sources for expert assessments include general news, media reports, and expert surveys and the questions will be designed to narrow down this information as much as possible.

On the student and staff participation value, it was clarified that it falls in the rights and freedoms category of values. Therefore, the *de facto* monitoring looks at the infringements with otherwise the same structure as other values with protection, promotion, outlook and the *de facto* narrative report. The related dimensions were presented along with suggested questions to measure them.

Feedback to the 2<sup>nd</sup> day's presentation included suggestions to make language as specific as possible in order to ensure comparable data. Vague terms such as regularly, adequate, sufficient should be revised in order to yield specific and reliable answers. One approach suggested was retaining the term adequate but seeking clarification from government/public authorities on their understanding of adequate funding, for instance, thus allowing for diverse models to be considered and compared, or alternatively, specifying numerical benchmarks for a more precise evaluation. There was support among members to leave it up to authorities to define adequate funding. A context-specific approach suggested involved observing the system's public funding evolution rather than imposing a universal benchmark. It was reiterated that some of these issues will be determined by the entity tasked to do the monitoring.





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Another recommendation was for the monitoring framework to explore the relationship between public and non-public funding and the associated responsibilities, as well as the relationship between legal regulations and policies. One idea to possibly reconcile these aspects is to combine them in a map that compares the *de jure* and *de facto* dimensions without changing their respective quantitative and qualitative measurements.

Liviu Matei (NewFAV Project Guest) continued the presentation on the last value of public responsibility for and of higher education, to be included in the monitoring framework. Mr. Matei noted the dimensions extracted from the statements for this particular value and introduced the *de facto* and *de jure* monitoring. It was suggested that the outlook should be monitored separately for the protection and promotion aspects as these are not necessarily convergent.

It was emphasized that, in general, the monitoring framework focuses on the system level but that the discussion on public responsibility of higher education involves the institutional level, emphasizing that the responsibility for public engagement lies not with the government but with the institutions. It was noted that, in monitoring, much is already covered by Eurydice's work, but that a unique aspect of this framework is the obligation of public authorities to consult and seek input regarding its structure and content.

It was clarified that the piloting phase will focus on systems rather than entire countries, with four countries selected for refining the list of indicators by June 2024. Subsequently, the monitoring body, yet to be determined, will receive the indicators after this piloting phase.

## 9. Session 7: Fundamental Values Working Group Report

Co-Chair, Romania presented the draft structure of the report for the BFUG meeting, detailing the process of including the fundamental values statements, the WG's meetings, and events. It was highlighted that the report will include recommendations for the Tirana communique. The focus was on discussing recommendations for the structure of the FV WG in the next working period.

The three crucial components that were suggested the report should include were the technical framework for monitoring as well as recommendations and the role of the WG for the next working period. The WG's proposal to the BFUG would suggest the continuity of the FV WG during the next period, with flexibility in its structure, potentially as a working group, advisory group, or task force under the monitoring working group. Emphasis was placed on the continuous development of the monitoring framework until all FVs are monitored. There was a suggestion to incorporate a promotion of peer learning aspects as well as include a brief description of the framework, the process, and the outcomes within Chapter Three of the report.

It was discussed whether peer learning activities (PLAs) for FVs should continue to be organized by this WG or potentially be handed over to the Bologna implementation Coordination Group (BICG) in the future. Some members recommended the handover, while others insisted that the FV's as a topic are not sufficiently well-established to be handed over to another structure, such as the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) and thus work on it should be kept to this WG for the next working period. It was further reiterated that, by then, the statements and monitoring framework will have been completed and the WG can focus on PLA's.

Addressing concrete violations and instances of threats to FVs was identified as a key task for the group's future focus. In the upcoming mandate, the focus would be on full monitoring, with subsequent working periods addressing concrete violations. Concerns were raised about the absence of guidelines on addressing violations and the need to clarify whose task or responsibility this is. While it was suggested that the BFUG, based on this WG's recommendations, could incorporate methods of addressing violations, it was also noted that the existing proposal to the drafting group only included instances where fundamental values were



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threatened rather than violated. However, if adopted by ministers in the communique, this can serve as a foundation where the WG can base their future strategies to address threats in the next working period.

When making recommendations to the BFUG on the future of the FV WG, it was suggested that the main focus should be on ensuring that the BFUG comprehends the practical aspects of the WG's proposal, the advantages and disadvantages of each recommendation, before making a decision. In formulating recommendations, it was highlighted that the group should articulate clear arguments in favor of a standalone FV WG as well as the prospect of addressing potential threats to fundamental values in the future and emphasize the importance of examining synergies with other working groups.

It was suggested that the recommendations be divided into short-term goals (2024-2027) and medium to long-term objectives (2027-2030 or beyond), aligning with the scheme anticipated in the Tirana communique.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 3 WG FV Report 1](#)

### **Session 8: Conclusions, next meetings and AOB**

Co-Chair, Romania announced that the annex and draft text of the Communique have been finalized and approved by the FV WG and that these proposals will be presented in the upcoming BFUG meeting in Madrid. While feedback is welcomed from the BFUG and Drafting Committee, it was emphasized that a redrafting process should be avoided.

The next FV PLA is scheduled for January 23, 2024 PLA and the FV WG meeting for the 24-25. People from various frameworks will be invited to the PLA on January 23<sup>rd</sup> and FV WG members were encouraged to attend. The January PLA topic is the interrelations among the fundamental values while in March, public responsibility for and of higher education will be discussed. The final meeting of the FV WG is set in March 20-22 in Oslo, Norway, with the possibility of an additional online meeting in between the two if needed.

The question of who will be tasked with the monitoring of the FVs after the monitoring framework has been completed may be raised at the upcoming BFUG meeting in Madrid or in the subsequent one in Brussels. The WG decided to agree on a concrete, formal proposal to be presented for further discussion at the BFUG, along with clarification on capacities, independence, and coordination of the actors to be involved in the monitoring of FVs. There was agreement to keep Eurydice's involvement in the process, while acknowledging that it does not have the capacity for full monitoring of the FVs. The WG agreed on the potential necessity of an independent body for full monitoring, suggesting that the BFUG link could be maintained through a reference group with a common co-chair. In the meantime, expertise and potential assistance will also be sought from the EC in order to clarify further the specifics of who can contribute to the monitoring process.

The plan of the WG was to send the Drafting Committee an updated version after the Board meeting on January 25<sup>th</sup>, allowing ample time for the BFUG to receive the revised version adopted by the WG before the BFUG meeting in Brussels on February 19-20, 2024.

