



Latvian Presidency  
of the Council of the  
European Union



MENNTA - OG  
MENNINGARMÁLARÁÐUNEYTIÐ  
*Ministry of Education, Science and Culture*

*Doc. Code: BFUG\_LV\_IS\_43\_3  
Last modified: 23.01.2015*

**MEETING OF THE BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP**  
**Rome, 27 November 2014 - 28 November 2014**  
**Draft Outcome of Proceedings**

**Participant list**

<b>Country / Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>
Albania	<i>Absent</i>
Andorra	Maria del Mar Martinez Ramirez
Andorra	Maria Meritxell Gallo Yanes
Armenia	Karine Harutyunyan
Armenia	Robert Sukiasyan
Austria	Gottfried Bacher
Azerbaijan	Azad Akhundov
Belgium/Flemish Community	Noël Vercruysse
Belgium/French Community	Kevin Guillaume
BFUG Secretariat	Gayane Harutyunyan
BFUG Secretariat	Ani Hovhannisyan
BFUG Secretariat	Sahakanush Sargsyan
BFUG Secretariat	Hayk Sargsyan
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Aida Durić
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Petar Marić
Bulgaria	Ivana Radonova
BUSINESSEUROPE	<i>Apologies</i>
Council of Europe	Sjur Bergan
Croatia	Ana Tecilazić Goršić
Cyprus	Despina Martidou-Forcier
Czech Republic	Tereza Kobelkova
Denmark	Jonas Husum Johannesen
EC	Adam Tyson
EC	Frank Petrikowski
EI	Jens Vraa-Jensen
EI	Guntars Catlaks
ENQA	Padraig Walsh
ENQA	Maria Kelo
EQAR	Colin Tück
EQAR	Eric Froment

Estonia	Janne Pukk
ESU	Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares
EURASHE	Johan Cloet
EUROSTAT	<i>Absent</i>
EUROSTUDENT	<i>Absent</i>
Eurydice	David Crosier
EUA	Michael Gaebel
Finland	Maja Innola
France	Patricia Pol
France	Hélène Lagier
Georgia	Elene Jibladze
Germany	Peter Greisler
Germany	Katrin Fohmann
Germany	Heide Ahrens
Greece	Christos Skouras
Holy See	Friedrich Bechina
Holy See	Julia Maria Gonzales Ferreras
Holy See	Karolina Kasperaviciute
Holy See	Giovanni Patriarca
Holy See	Melanie Rosenbaum
Hungary	Ernö Keszei
Iceland	Una Vidarsdottir
Ireland	Tim Cullinane
Italy	Daniele Livon
Italy	Maria Sticchi Damiani
Italy	Marzia Foroni
Italy	Nicola Vittorio
Kazakhstan	Amantay Nurmagambetov
Kazakhstan	Yekaterina Chernykh
Latvia	Andrejs Rauhvargers
Latvia	Agrita Kiopa
Latvia	Jolanta Silka
Liechtenstein	Daniel Miescher
Lithuania	Elena Armalyte
Luxembourg	Claude Joseph Schaber
Luxembourg	Corinne Kox
Luxembourg	Leon Andre Diederich
Malta	Tanya Sammut-Bonnici
Moldova	<i>Absent</i>
Montenegro	Biljana Misovic

Netherlands	Jolien van der Vegt
Norway	<i>Apologies</i>
Poland	Maria Boltruszko
Poland	Bartłomiej Banaszak
Portugal	Ana Mateus
Portugal	Ines Vasques
Romania	Radu-Mircea Damian
Russian Federation	Nadezhda Kamynina
Russian Federation	Svetlana Shvedova
Serbia	Mirjana Vesovic
Slovak Republic	Marek Gilanyi
Slovak Republic	Zuzana Krajcovicova
Slovenia	<i>Absent</i>
Spain	Luis Delgado
Sweden	Sara Bringle
Switzerland	François Grandjean
"the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	<i>Absent</i>
Turkey	Şaban Halis Çalış
Ukraine	<i>Absent</i>
UNESCO	<i>Absent</i>
United Kingdom	Pamela Wilkinson
United Kingdom	Ian Crombie
United Kingdom/Scotland	Rebecca Robinson

## **1. Welcome and Introduction to the BFUG Meeting by the Chairs**

### **Welcome by Italy**

The Chair, Mr. Daniele Livon, Director General (DG) for Higher Education (HE) of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research of Italy, welcomed the participants and introduced the agenda of the two-day BFUG meeting. Afterwards, Mr. Livon, recalled the fruitful seminar held on 18-19 September 2014 in Rome on the Future of the Bologna Process (BP) while stressing that the discussions during the seminar resulted in the following three important points:

1. There is a consolidated agreement on the state of play of the implementation of the Bologna reforms and the main problems.
2. The Process is a platform where the governmental representatives can elaborate common policies for European challenges.
3. There is a need to complete the work and develop the best organisational solution for the future.

Moreover, the Chair shared the experience of the similar debate on the future of the BP during the meeting of the DG on HE in Palermo in October, where, among other issues, the present situation of the European cooperation in HE policies was discussed. In this relation many countries underlined the need for the BP to focus more on its strategic and visionary approach

as well as important synergies and complementarities existing between the EU and EHEA policy debates and tools.

Last but not least it was stressed that the political relevance of the BP in Europe and in the dialogue with the global partners remains strong and the added value of the European approach that is followed is often stressed.

### **Welcome by Holy See**

Mr. Friedrich Bechina, highlighted that he would like to quote a message from the recent speech of His Holiness Pope Francis addressed to the European Parliament and Council of Europe during his visit to Strasbourg on 25 November 2014 since it was very much in line with the discussions on the future of the BP. Thus, it was quoted that: "There has been growing mistrust on the part of citizens towards institutions considered to be aloof, engaged in laying down rules perceived as insensitive to individual peoples, if not downright harmful. In many quarters we encounter a general impression of weariness and aging, of a Europe which is now a "grandmother", no longer fertile and vibrant. As a result, the great ideas which once inspired Europe seem to have lost their attraction, only to be replaced by the bureaucratic technicalities of its institutions".

Afterwards, Mr. Bechina expressed his appreciation and gratitude to the Italian BFUG Co-Chair for good cooperation and assistance.

**The BFUG was informed that there were 83 participants present at the meeting and the apologies were received from BUSINESSEUROPE and Norway. The following countries/organisations were not present at the meeting Albania, EUROSTAT, EUROSTUDENT, Moldova, Slovenia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Ukraine and UNESCO.**

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

Documents: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_2a [Draft agenda]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_2b [Draft annotated agenda]

**While adopting the agenda the BFUG was informed that Georgia had sent its invitation to host the 2018 Ministerial Conference and the Bologna Secretariat on 26 November 2014. It was agreed to consider the candidature of Georgia with the invitation submitted by France on 17 November under point 10 of the agenda. Moreover, the agenda was adopted with the inclusion of one item in "AOB", i.e. information to the BFUG on the European Network for Ombudsmen in Higher Education (ENOHE).**

### **3. Draft outcome of proceedings of the extraordinary BFUG meeting, Rome 18-19 September 2014**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_3 [BFUG Rome draft outcome of proceedings]

**The draft outcome of proceedings of the extraordinary Rome BFUG meeting was approved without any amendments.**

### **4. Outcomes of the BFUG internal seminar on the Future of the Bologna Process**

Ms. Maria Sticchi Damiani (Italy) presented the latest revised version of the paper "Bologna Process Revisited: Future of the EHEA" and invited the BFUG to present their comments.

Thus, in general the BFUG agreed that the paper reflected very well the overall discussions of the seminar on the future of the BP held in Rome on 18 September 2014 and captured the mood of the deliberations. Moreover, the paper managed to put together very diverse discussions. Therefore, it was highlighted that besides suggesting some rephrasing in the document, it is important to decide and agree on the following:

- Whether there are things that are missing in the paper;
- How to turn all these thoughts into concrete proposals for actions.

As for the first (**Looking back: 15 years of convergence**) and second (**Looking ahead: new challenges, new goals, new strategies**) parts of the paper the BFUG agreed that the objectives suggested in the paper are still at the aspiration level. Thus, there is a need to try to turn those aspirational objectives into something that is more concrete and measurable so that they can be put forward for the Ministers for the discussion and agreement.

Furthermore, it was noted that the paper could be the basis to prepare a good deliberation for the Yerevan Ministerial Conference. The latter one should be good in two ways:

1. Identifying the direction of the EHEA for the upcoming period;
2. Engaging the Ministers.

For this purpose two main documents should be developed:

1. Draft Communiqué
2. The paper "Bologna Process Revisited\_Future of the EHEA"

Moreover, the BFUG made the following concrete comments:

- While talking about promoting the use of technological innovations in teaching and learning, there is a need to discuss the challenges of the new modes of learning as well.
- Bringing forward the issue of the social dimension is very important as well as it is a key for an inclusive EHEA.
- There is a need to connect HE and research better as the distinctive feature of the EHEA.
- Design of new educational programmes or the updating of the existing ones should be under the responsibility of HE institutions.
- In the suggested goal concerning the 'rise of new conflicts', the role of education should be emphasised.
- There is a need to add another goal to address the global dimension of the EHEA which could specify continuous policy dialogue and strategic partnership with other regions of the world, especially with the ones developing common areas of HE.

As for the third part of the paper (**Organisational issues**), the BFUG noted that there is a need to identify a limited number of fundamental issues that the Ministers might be interested

and not the general ones. Moreover, the work carried out within this period should be correctly wrapped as well as new issues that might be important to deal with in the EHEA should be identified.

Therefore, the BFUG noted that

- It is appreciated that the paper suggests having better links with the practitioners; however it will be useful to have links also with HE or Bologna researchers.
- It should be emphasised that the BFUG could be supported by international networks of academics and other experts.
- There is a need to make the BFUG meetings more focused.
- In the evaluation procedures/stocktaking, there is a need of wording change since the stocktaking was stopped five years ago when it was decided to have a report with real statistical data for the next Ministerial Conference.

As for the issue of the Bologna Secretariat, the BFUG stressed that the suggested set-up of the permanent Secretariat was not the only option discussed at the September seminar. Thus, there is a need for the revision highlighting the options suggested at the seminar.

Finally the BFUG noted that while considering the goals put forward there is a need to consider timing left for the 2015 Yerevan Ministerial Conference. Moreover, maybe it will be good to send the revised version of the paper to the EHEA Ministers before Christmas for consideration.

**Thus, the Chair summarised the discussions underlining that in general the BFUG agreed on the content of the paper. The suggested rephrasings and comments are welcome and should be sent to the Co-Chairs by 8 December 2014. After that date the Co-Chairs would send the final revised version of the first two sections to the BFUG for possible presentation to the Ministers and the revised version of the third section on the organizational issues to the group established for drafting the Communiqué (Italy and Holy See as present Co-Chairs as well as Latvia and Iceland as the upcoming Co-Chairs and Armenia as a Vice Chair and the Secretariat) who would be responsible for preparing a proposal to be discussed more thoroughly in the Riga BFUG meeting on 26-27 January 2015. Moreover, while revising the organisational issues, the two countries (France and Georgia) that applied for the organisation of the 2018 Ministerial Conference and hosting the Bologna Secretariat should be consulted by the Co-Chairs and invited to the discussion.**

## **5. Draft final reports from the Chairs of the WGs**

### **5a. Reporting on the Bologna Process Implementation WG**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_5a [First draft of the 2015 Implementation Report]

Mr. Andrejs Rauhvargers (Latvia) the Co-Chair of the **Reporting on the Implementation of the Bologna Process WG**, and Mr. David Crosier (Eurydice) in turn presented the draft implementation report by highlighting that it is only the first draft which is not yet complete. A lot of data that is included in the report is still to be checked. Nevertheless, for the WG it is important at this stage for the improvement of the content of the report and its recommendations to have reactions of the BFUG. It was stressed that the WG tried to keep as

many indicators as possible thus the report is substantial and long. The chapters on employability and internationalization still require content related work, there is a need to change the order of some chapters (SD, LLL and employability) and reorganise the content.

Three scorecard indicators that previously were submitted to the BFUG have been removed since the indicator on Lisbon Recognition Convention can lead to a distorted picture, while the two other indicators one on internationalisation and the other one on level recognition are not yet sufficient robust to be added to the list of scorecard indicators. In both cases the WG is sure that a more robust indicator can be developed for the 2018 report.

Thus, the WG has agreed to recommend the four new scorecard indicators for the 2015 Implementation Report. Moreover, the BFUG was invited to decide either to include these new scorecard indicators alongside those established indicators that remain relevant, or alternatively to remove all scorecard indicators from the report.

The BFUG was also asked to express opinions whether there is a need for the Implementation Report to develop a separate document with key findings and shorter conclusions.

It was also stressed that the countries should provide their comments until December 5 and that the second draft of the report with updated indicators provided by the EUROSTAT and EUROSTUDENT with key findings and tentative conclusions will be ready on December 19.

For more details, see the PowerPoint presentation below:



BFUG\_Powerpoint\_R  
ome.ppt

The deliberation followed stressed that:

- The section of the draft report on recognition of qualifications is limited. The full version will take into account the results of the Pathfinder WG and other related developments.
- There is a need to have a more coherent and consolidated view of the current state of implementation of the Bologna reforms across the EHEA.
- Showing trends and highlighting issues for the next period could be very useful.
- A shorter version of the report with key findings and conclusions will be needed. The document could be a useful tool to communicate the EHEA achievements to the other regions of the world.
- The shorter version should not compromise the reliability of the report and should strive to provide the realistic image of the implementation by the EHEA countries.
- There is a need to develop a communication strategy for presentation of all the documents-a holistic approach will be beneficial.

#### **5b. Structural Reforms WG**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_5b [Draft final report of the Structural Reforms WG]

The Co-Chair of the Structural Reforms (SR) WG, Mr. Sjur Bergan (CoE) presented the draft final report on behalf of the SR WG. It was noted that 40 countries and organisations were

represented in the WG. Most of the members participated actively in the meetings and contributed to the report. The cooperation between the Co-Chairs was also excellent.

The four sub-groups formed under the SR WG were presented and it was noted that three of them worked well. The ad-hoc WG on the third cycle developed a substantial report and would present it separately to the BFUG for discussion. Certain proposals from the ad-hoc WG's report fed into the corresponding part in the SR WG draft final report. As for the ad-hoc WG on the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide, the successive drafts of the Guide were presented to the SR WG. Thus, the current version of the Guide has benefitted from the SR WG comments. The network of NQF correspondents did not submit a separate report to the SRWG, but contributed directly to the SR WG's draft final report.

However, to the SR WG's regret its fourth sub-structure, i.e. RPL Network, had not provided any substantial input for the draft final report. It was further explained that the situation was not due to miscommunication. The Chair of the Network was constantly contacted, participated in the SR WG meetings and had clear information on the deadline for submitting the input. Given the importance of the issue of recognition of prior learning, the SR WG nevertheless addressed the topic in the final report.

It was explained how the structures fit together in the infrastructure for transparency and recognition of the EHEA. This was regarded as an important added dimension of bringing the 4 policy areas (i.e. QF, QA, recognition and transparency) together.

The Co-Chair invited the BFUG to consider the key recommendations the SR WG prepared for the Ministers. The recommendations ranged from the commitment to communicate the vision and mission of the EHEA, to build capacity to implement a learning outcomes and student centered learning approach at grassroots level, to more specific ones, e.g. to decide to include short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA, to review the Diploma Supplement (DS) (this is a joint recommendation of SR WG and PfG), to adopt the revised ECTS Users' Guide, to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, etc.

Another key recommendation to the Ministers was to take note of the SR WG report and ask the BFUG to take account of its recommendations in developing the 2015-2018 work program.

Finally, it was highlighted that the report duly acknowledged the difference within the EHEA higher education systems and the need to take account of the different traditions, but it also emphasised the need to achieve the common goals. In this sense the full implementation of structural reforms was important since the latter was perceived as a key aspect of making the EHEA a reality.

It was also explained that SR WG worked as a group in a spirit of compromise. However there was one point on which the views of the WG members were most divided with some members in favour and others against. The recommendation is as follows "...mandate the BFUG co-chairs and the Bologna Secretariat to contact the competent authorities of the EHEA members with an unsatisfactory implementation of structural reforms in the 2015 EHEA Implementation Report by the end of 2015 with offers of assistance..." (p.8). The BFUG was asked to advise the WG with this regard.

For more details, please refer to the PowerPoint Presentation below:





The BFUG appreciated the good quality and clear structure of the SRWG's draft final report and highlighted that the structure enabled the readers to get a good grasp of the issues the WG dealt with. Moreover, the idea of a clear executive summary with a short list of recommendations was welcomed.

The discussion of the report revolved mainly around the following issues **i) the differences observed in the third cycle across the EHEA, ii) the formulation of the recommendation offering assistance to the EHEA countries which lag behind in implementation, iii) the enhancement of the flow of information between the EQF advisory group and Network of NQF Correspondents and iv) the decision to include short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA.**

**On the first issue**, the BFUG noted that the differences observed in the third cycle to a large extent were tied to the cultural context in the countries. However, it was explained that the intention of SR WG and ad-hoc WG on the third cycle was not to impose rigid regulations on doctoral education (in terms of the use of ECTS or DS), rather to give options how to use the tools. Other specific suggestions were received for rephrasing the corresponding section in the SRWG final report.

**On the second issue** of offering assistance to the countries that lag behind, the BFUG acknowledged that it was one of the most important issues to consider for the period. In Bucharest the main focus was on implementation. However, this commitment was not achieved. Hence, there was a need of agreement on some mechanism to support the countries in bringing their performance forward so that all could move in the same direction in a more consistent speed. A clear signal should come from the documents endorsed by the Ministers in 2015, that the BFUG would support even implementation across the EHEA. This goal could be achieved only through direct contact with the countries that are facing particular challenges, and the number of these countries is not small, since nearly all the EHEA countries are experiencing some kind of problems. Finally, the BFUG suggested that a policy dialogue with these countries could be more effective than offering assistance in the matter. The BFUG could take a step further and give consideration on what to do if this proved to be less fruitful than expected.

**On the third point**, it was highlighted that the BFUG members should encourage on one hand their respective national correspondents to be in constant contact with the EQF colleagues and on the other hand, encourage EQF members to talk more with their HE colleagues. This would come to supplement the annual joint meetings of the national coordination points of EQF and the national correspondents for QFs and would enhance the referencing of the qualifications to the proper QF levels.

**On the last point**, to some BFUG members' concern that the inclusion of short-cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA might have undesirable consequences in their NQFs it was explained that the recommendation as it stood was meant to reflect the fact that some EHEA countries had short-cycle qualifications in their NQFs; it would not oblige countries to include short cycle qualifications in their own national frameworks if they did not wish to do so.

Other proposals and remarks were also received from the BFUG: i) given the importance of RPL, to keep focusing on the policy area in the future, ii) the recommendation to ENQA and EQAVET to review the common principles of quality assurance in higher education, in vocational education and training was welcomed.

**The Chair, Ms. Marzia Foroni (Italy) recalled the agreement on developing concrete proposals in terms of measures to support the implementation at the national and institutional level (expected to be put forward in January 2015) for the preparation and follow-up of the discussion on the future of the Bologna Process and noted that it was much in line and interconnected with the proposed policy dialogue with the countries that lag behind. Thus, it could be reasonable to tackle the two issues jointly.**

**The Co-Chair of the SRWG, Mr. Sjur Bergan (CoE) thanked the BFUG for the comments received and noted that the final report would be amended i) to clarify in a footnote that the situation of doctoral candidates varies greatly throughout the EHEA and for the purpose of the report the terms “doctoral qualifications” and “doctoral candidates” will generally be preferred to “doctoral education” or “doctoral training”, ii) to reformulate the recommendation on the assistance to be offered to the EHEA countries with a stress on the policy dialogue to say something along the lines of “ask the BFUG Co-Chairs and the Secretariat to work with the EHEA members to offer some policy dialogue on the basis of the 2015 Implementation Report”.**

**The BFUG adopted the SRWG final report with these 2 amendments.**

### **5c. Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning WG**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_5c.1 [Draft final report of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning WG]

BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_5c.2 [Draft Strategy for Widening Participation for Equity and Growth]

BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_5c.3 [Draft Guidelines for National Access Plans or Strategies]

The Chair, Ms. Marzia Foroni (Italy) advised the participants that the draft final report of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning WG (SD&LLL WG) and accompanying documents were submitted very close to the BFUG meeting not allowing enough time for the BFUG to consider them properly. Therefore, the WG did not expect the documents to be endorsed by the BFUG at the meeting; instead the WG sought to receive feedback from the BFUG. The SD&LLL WG would then revise the documents in line with the comments received from the BFUG and present them for further discussion and endorsement at the Riga BFUG meeting in January 2015.

Mr. Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares (ESU) presented the draft final report on behalf of Ms. Elisabeth Gehrke, the ESU Co-Chair of the SD&LLL WG, who was not able to attend the meeting. The WG had prepared i) a final report which covered the activities carried out in the current period, ii) the Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020, and iii) Guidelines to assist countries in developing national plans or strategies for access, participation and completion in higher education.

Furthermore, the BFUG was informed that the SD&LLL WG would put forward two main recommendations for adoption by the Ministers in Yerevan i) to support the Peer Learning for

the Social Dimension (PL4SD) project beyond September 2015 and ii) to adopt the document "Widening Participation for Equity and Growth - *A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020*". The Guidelines would not be presented to the Ministers for adoption; rather they were aimed to assist the EHEA countries in developing a national plan or strategy for access, participation and completion in higher education.

Finally, given that the BFUG members did not have enough time to discuss the documents in their respective Ministries/organisations, they were encouraged to submit written comments to the Secretariat by 10 December 2014.

In the discussion that followed, a number of suggestions were received towards the revision of the documents.

Concerning the draft final report, the BFUG advised the SD&LLL WG

- to restructure the SD&LLL WG's report to adopt the organisation of the Structural Reforms WG final report, i.e. at the beginning of the report to include an executive summary and the recommendations. Then, throughout the report to be clear how the recommendations were achieved.
- to make the section on the PL4SD more concise and some of its parts annex to the draft final report.

Concerning the draft Strategy and the Guidelines, in general the participants agreed that set of recommendations concerning social dimension should be adopted by the Ministers. However, at the same time some members were hesitant to have a strategy as a separate document being an attachment to the Communiqué. At the same time, some others were hesitant to call for a national plan at the European level; rather they agreed that it might be preferable to embed the social dimension in the overall higher education strategy of the EHEA countries. Nevertheless, it was also contended that when part of the general higher education strategy, the social dimension might be easily overlooked. The importance of participation in higher education could be argued from two different and compatible standpoints: i) the society could not afford not to make the best use of all the talents in it and ii) from the point of individual justice, the society owes to its individual citizens to enable them to develop their talents, motivations and aspirations to the full extent. Finally, as a societal goal, knowledge society and knowledge economy could not be achieved without a broad participation in higher education. And having a strategy in the policy area would be an important step forward towards this goal.

A number of other general and concrete suggestions were received to improve the document:

- Some elements in the Strategy and Guidelines documents could be restructured. Certain objectives in the Strategy could be made sharper, whereas some elements in the guidelines could be brought into the Strategy to give more depth to its overall objectives.
- It was acknowledged that the most important recommendation in the document was to develop national plans. However, a national plan can be extremely helpful provided that it brings together all the different stakeholders (policy makers, students, rectors' conferences, civil society, etc.). Moreover, the very process of setting and implementing the plan was deemed more important than the actual product to be achieved in the end.
- In addition, it was acknowledged that it is hard to define common goals in the area of social dimension, which would be valid for each country in the EHEA. Therefore, the SD&LLL WG was advised to give appropriate consideration to the relationship between

national plans and how to bring them together as the EHEA. One of the options could be to provide countries an opportunity to learn from each other's national strategy.

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education was referred to. It was highlighted that the quality of education system cannot be separated from the social system. A successful education system provides its learners with adequate opportunities and means to develop their aspirations and hence promotes diversity and social inclusion.
- Teachers play a crucial role in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. To do so, they should be given proper tools to adjust the curricula.
- Moreover, when referring to Guidelines, it was suggested that the first step should be to obtain data on the social dimension issues, and only afterwards set targets.
- It was appreciated that the documents tackled not only access but also participation and completion issues in higher education. However, the Strategy as it stood, laid more emphasis on access.
- In the section of Overall objectives in the Strategy, Point 4 should be expanded to include employment as one of the purposes of recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- It was noted that the Strategy focuses more on quantitative elements; instead qualitative aspects should be more stressed.

**The Chair, Ms. Marzia Foroni (Italy) concluded that the documents would be revised to express the broader consensus of the BFUG and presented for endorsement at the Riga BFUG meeting in January 2015.**

#### **5d. Mobility and Internationalisation WG**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_5d [Draft final report of the Mobility and Internationalisation WG]

The BFUG was informed that the sixth meeting of the WG was held on 8-9 September 2014 in Vienna. The draft final report of the Mobility and Internationalisation WG was presented by its Co-Chair, Mr. Peter Greisler (Germany). It was underlined that all the WG members (including NESSIE Co-Chairs) contributed to the report.

It was noted that such working methods as workshops and working conferences on the respective topics, could be more effective in future. Meanwhile, some of the work could be accomplished through online sessions and the substance could be discussed during the WG meetings.

Moreover, it was underlined that the WG together with the Structural Reforms WG contributed to the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The proposal was accepted by both WGs and the BFUG.

Thus, the WG prioritised the topics to be included in the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué and the BFUG was briefed on the outcomes of seven main topics discussed during the WG meetings:

- The group came up with the definition of Staff Mobility and highly prioritized the issue as it has European dimension;
- Mobility of teacher training students in the EHEA carries a great potential for joint efforts to encourage student mobility throughout the EHEA;
- The Quality in Mobility paper is based on European Quality Mobility Charter;
- The group decided that there is no need for European target on mobility as starting conditions for member states differ;
- Paper on Overcoming Underrepresentation in Student Credit Mobility developed by the WG identify three main target groups;
- Guidelines on Portability of Student Support were adopted to give a framework for EHEA member countries governments on which they can react.

Mr. Luis Delgado (Spain), Co-Chair of the WG, introduced the 2014 reviewed version of "The EHEA in a Global Setting", a provisional version of which is annexed to the draft final report.

The discussions emphasised that:

- The structure of the WG final report should be changed;
- The recommendations for 2015 Yerevan Communiqué should be reconsidered and sharpened;
- The WG final report should be depersonalised;
- The WG Co-Chairs should clarify whether "The EHEA in a Global Setting: 2014 Strategy Review" should be adopted by the Ministers during the 2015 Yerevan Conference;
- The portability of loans should be discussed further. The recommendations should reflect different views across the EHEA on the respective issue.

**All the comments received from the BFUG members would be taken into consideration by the WG's Co-Chairs. The final report should be presented for adoption during the next BFUG meeting in Riga.**

## **6. Proposal for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**

Documents: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_6a [European Approach QA of Joint Programmes\_Cover Letter]  
 BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_6b [European Approach QA of Joint Programmes\_Oct 2014]  
 BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_6c [European Approach QA of Joint Programmes\_Background Report]

Ms. Marzia Foroni, the Italian Co-Chair informed the BFUG that the procedure for the official approval of the proposal for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes is complete since the Co-Chairs had received official written confirmation from the countries requesting more time for the endorsement of the proposal. The Expert group included the proposed changes in the proposal and it is ready to be presented to the Ministers for approval.

Mr. Colin Tück (EQAR) thanked the BFUG for their comments while informing that as agreed by the BFUG the proposal for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes would be published with the indication that it is subject to approval by the Ministers.

## 7. Draft final report of the Pathfinder group on automatic recognition

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_7a [Draft final report of the Pathfinder group on automatic recognition]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_7b [HEI survey results\_recognition and assessment of foreign qualifications]

Mr. Adam Tyson (EC) introduced the final report of the **Pathfinder group on automatic recognition** on behalf of the group members. The BFUG was reminded that since the EHEA Ministers were aware of the importance of improving recognition processes, they committed themselves to the long-term goal of automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees in the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. Thus, the Pathfinder group on automatic recognition was established composed of 10 countries (Belgium/French Community, Belgium/Flemish Community, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and The Netherlands), and supported by the European Commission, to explore ways to achieve this.

Moreover, the BFUG was presented with the results of the 2-year work performed by the Pathfinder group as well as its main focus. Thus, in order to support the EHEA Ministers in achieving the long-term goal of automatic recognition, Pathfinder group has formulated a number of recommendations, which help to set out the path for the EHEA countries to arrive at automatic recognition. The core recommendation of the Group to the EHEA Ministers is **to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are recognised on an equal level with domestic qualifications, for example through enacting specific legislation to achieve this objective.**

In addition, it was stressed that the Group proposes to the EHEA Ministers to implement a number of smaller steps as a starting point to arrive at automatic recognition. For more details, see the PowerPoint presentation below:



Pathfinder Report  
BFUG 27 November 2

Last but not least the BFUG was informed that the Group also had self-reflection on the group's work while perceiving it as very positive based on a clear task and with a tangible result. The group believes that the format of its work, involving a limited number of like-minded countries willing to take concrete steps in order to make progress in a specific field, could be a model for more focused work in the Bologna context for the period of 2015-2018.

Moreover, based on the experiences made, the Group believes that regional cooperation is a useful way forward, provided that the results are transferable and non-exclusive.

The BFUG noted that

- The report is very important and the Group made a sensible choice on focusing on the system level recognition. Nevertheless calling this automatic recognition is raising the expectations.
- The report is added value, since it also shows the different ways in which the countries have put this into practice and for the next work programme of the BFUG it will be good to ask the ENIC-NARIC Networks to look how this can be furthered.

- There is a necessity to revise the Diploma Supplement jointly by the CoE, EC and UNESCO. However, it is crucial to ensure that the same revised version of the document is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as that of the European Union (Europass).
- Since the working method of the Group can be considered added value for the Bologna Process, that part should be expanded and put at the beginning of the report.
- The codes from the ESN survey should be made clearer maybe in form of the annexes at the end of the report.
- Maybe there is a need to have some recommendation on the language since for the recognition purposes usually the translation of documents is needed.
- There is a need to clarify whether the principle of the bachelor being a bachelor will also apply for the master level.

Afterwards, Mr. Tyson (EC) clarified that there was a discussion in the group concerning the professional recognition, however the Group decided that at this stage the Group cannot deal with it but it can be one of the tasks addressed by the Ministers during the 2015 Conference to the Pathfinder group. As for the differentiation between the credit recognition and degree recognition, the BFUG was informed that the Group agreed to focus exclusively on the full recognition of degree. Moreover, it was stressed that this initiative is not only for the EU member states but for the non EU states as well. Last but not least it was stressed that the Group would highlight the part on working methods earlier in the report.

**The BFUG decided to include the final report of the Pathfinder group on automatic recognition in the documents to be submitted to the Ministers.**

### **8. Draft revised ECTS Users' Guide**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_8a [Draft revised ECTS Users' Guide]

BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_8b [Annexes to the draft revised ECTS Users' Guide]

Mr. Adam Tyson (EC) presented the revised ECTS Users' Guide while recalling the mandate of the ad-hoc group laid down in the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. Thus, the ad-hoc group composed of experts nominated by the countries and organisations held 5 meetings during the period of 2013-2014 during which the Guide was thoroughly discussed. Moreover, the stakeholders' consultation was organised in January 2014 as well as the Guide was twice presented during the Structural Reforms WG's meetings.

Furthermore, the BFUG was informed of the purpose and scope of the revised Guide as well as its status and new elements. For more details, see the PowerPoint presentation below:



ECTS Users%27  
guide BFUG 27 Nover

Finally, it was noted that the ad-hoc group on the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide proposes that:

- the Guide becomes an official document of the EHEA;
- be adopted by the Ministers at the Ministerial meeting in 2015;

- be reviewed on a regular basis to take into account the developments in HE.

The BFUG welcomed the Guide and appreciated the proposal of the ad-hoc group on the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide on the issue that the Guide should be revised more frequently. At the same time, the BFUG made some concrete comments, which are as follows:

- On page 8 in Nota Bene it was suggested to use "The use of ECTS in the third cycle **varies**".
- In the point 4.2.2 while using the phrase "(re)assessment of educational component", it is recommended to delete (re).

The BFUG also suggested some minor points for editing in terms of clarification.

Afterwards, Mr. Tyson (EC) informed the BFUG that the Group will make the necessary changes concerning the above suggested comments. As for the text box on doctoral education (p. 12-13) compromise text was proposed by the EC, Germany and EUA. Moreover, it was agreed to change "Doctoral training" to "Doctoral Degree". Furthermore it was clarified that the purpose of the text box is to say that ECTS can be used in doctoral education and not that it has to be used.

As for the half points, the BFUG was informed that there was a very difficult discussion in the Group concerning this point, but it is important to realise that this is not a recommended approach and the Guide says that this is an exception to a normal process. Hence, the Group would make sure that this point is properly reflected.

**The BFUG endorsed the revised ECTS users' Guide and decided to submit it to the Yerevan Ministerial conference for adoption.**

#### **9. Thematic session on the Third cycle**

Document: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_9a [Background paper of the thematic session]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_9b [Draft final report of the Third cycle ad-hoc WG]

The highlights of the discussion are presented as Annex 1 of the present document.

#### **10. Preparation of the Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué and Fourth Bologna Policy Forum Statement**

The Chair, Mr. Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) reminded the BFUG that the composition of the drafting group had already been set up during the previous BFUG meeting on 18-19 September 2014 in Rome including the representatives from Italy and Holy See as present Co-Chairs as well as Latvia and Iceland as the incoming Co-Chairs and Armenia as a Vice Chair and the Secretariat.

Thus, it was agreed that the 2015 Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué should try to avoid repetition while demonstrating common visions of the EHEA Ministers. The recommendations included in the Communiqué should be concrete. Moreover, there is a need to distinguish the work of the BFUG and the message conveyed for the public.

Ms. Marzia Foroni (Italy) briefly presented the deliberations of the drafting group held on 26 November 2014 in Rome. Thus, it was agreed that there should be three deliverables from the drafting group, namely:



1. **2015 Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué**- The latter should be sharp and focused as well as of interest to the Ministers and wider public. Moreover, it should be inclusive of the views of the Ministers on the future of the EHEA, reflecting the rich discussion held previously by the BFUG. The background for this purpose might serve section two of the revised paper on the future of the Bologna Process.
2. **Document on the recommendations from the WGs**-This document should be based on the main conclusions of the WGs' reports. Furthermore, the recommendations should have clear target groups and they should be based on the voluntary and explicit acceptance of each EHEA country. In case the countries feel the need to have special support implementing these recommendations, support measures can be included in the document. The document should also be inclusive of the endorsement part of the basic principles of the EHEA. Thus, the background document for the second deliverable should be the reports of the WGs together with the main conclusions endorsed by the BFUG. As for the implementation part probably section one of the revised paper on the future of the Bologna Process might be a reference.
3. **Statement of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bologna Policy Forum**-No decision has been taken up yet concerning this document. However there is a need to start the work as soon as possible with the support of the BFUG.

Mr. Andrejs Rauhvargers (Latvia) presented the detailed roadmap for drafting the documents. Thus, the drafting group had already met twice on 14 November 2014 in Riga and on 26 November 2014 in Rome and has decided to meet before and after each BFUG meeting. Moreover, the BFUG was informed that the drafting of the documents will start on 1 December 2014 and on 11-16 December 2014 draft 0 will be circulated to the drafting group while the second round of discussions of the group will take place on 19 December 2014. On 12 January 2015 the BFUG will receive draft 0 to be discussed during the January Riga BFUG meeting. Draft 1 will be presented during the Board meeting in Reykjavik.

The BFUG stressed that

- The Communiqué should be political and visionary as well as it should provide clear messages for all HE communities.
- It is extremely important to avoid repetition of language, style and structure of previous Communiqués while developing a document focused to re-launch politically the whole process.
- While reading the Communiqué, everybody should feel addressed.
- Maybe the Communiqué should be an open document that should be discussed directly by the Ministers; however this can be avoided by the constant feedback between the BFUG members and the respective Ministers.
- The drafting group should consider the timing left for the 2015 Yerevan Ministerial Conference.

As for the inclusion of a separate point concerning the adoption of the final reports of WGs in the agenda of the 2015 Yerevan Ministerial Conference and 4<sup>th</sup> Bologna Policy Forum, it was clarified that they should feed into the Ministerial Conference but they do not need to be presented as a separate point of the agenda and the Ministers should take note of them. However, there are a

number of elements that the Ministers need to adopt formally. In particular, while endorsing the reports of the WGs, there is a need to be explicit concerning the recommendations to be presented to the Ministers. Thus, there is a need to decide how it should be done technically, i.e. either to be included in the Communiqué or as an appendix.

**The BFUG took note of the timetable, working methods and main issues for the draft Yerevan Communiqué and Fourth Bologna Policy Forum Statement.**

**11. Update on the preparation of the Ministerial Conference and Fourth Bologna Policy Forum in Yerevan in 2015**

Documents: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_11a [Programme for the Yerevan MC and 4<sup>th</sup> BPF]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_11b [Proposal for the 4<sup>th</sup> BPF]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_11c [List of countries and organisations to be invited to the 4<sup>th</sup> BPF]

Ms. Karine Harutyunyan (Armenia) advised the BFUG that the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia (MoES) had been fully engaged in preparatory works for the Yerevan Ministerial Conference and Fourth Bologna Policy Forum (BPF). The venue was confirmed – the 2015 events would be organised in TUMO Centre for Creative Technologies. In addition, a short video clip was presented to give a glimpse of the activities carried out in the centre as well as of its facilities.

While referring to the regional focus of the Fourth BPF, the decision of the BFUG in its Athens meeting to concentrate on the Mediterranean region was mentioned. However, it was also noted that at the extraordinary BFUG meeting in Rome the deliberations had revealed that a number of EHEA members were not in favour of the regional approach since they were convinced that a broader platform was more relevant in terms of the opportunities of establishing strategic cooperation with the world and therefore, ensuring the success of the BPF. Based on the conclusion at the September BFUG meeting, which asked Armenia to come up with a proposal for the November BFUG meeting, the country is suggesting focusing on the EHEA neighbourhood including the Mediterranean region.

Furthermore, the first draft of the Yerevan Ministerial Conference and Fourth BPF agenda was presented to the BFUG. It was highlighted that compared to the past events, the agenda was designed to start with a joint opening session for the Ministerial Conference and BPF. Three parallel sessions were also foreseen.

In the discussion that followed a number of comments and suggestions were received on i) the focus of the Fourth BPF in terms of the proposed list of countries and organisations to be invited, ii) the first draft of the Yerevan Ministerial events' programme both in terms of the topics concerned and the form of organisation (i.e. in parallel and/or joint sessions); in particular it was noted that holding most of the meeting in parallel session would significantly reduce opportunities for interaction between EHEA members and other countries at ministerial level iii) how to make the dialogue with the world permanent and ongoing, and finally iv) how to attract more Ministers to participate in the Yerevan events. Some BFUG members expressed their disappointment with the proposed list of countries and organisations and made specific suggestions to expand it to include the following countries - Brazil, Japan, USA; and organisations – Association of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean, EI's affiliates from Canada and Argentina which have been working regionally on higher education issues and following the Bologna Process for a long time, and the Business and Industry Advisory

Committee (BIAC) and Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD which are not structural units of OECD and, therefore, should be invited separately.

On the other hand, it was acknowledged although being confronted with a difficult decision to make, Armenia, taking into account past discussions, had been able to come to a justifiable and sensible conclusion. The criterion of geographic proximity to the EHEA acted as a unifying theme for the countries to be invited to the Fourth BPF and was one of the important factors in terms of student and staff mobility issues. In a nutshell, there was logic in the decision, which was defensible and would enhance the usefulness and effectiveness of the event. Going beyond these countries might disrupt and undermine the logic.

Given the nature of the BPF as a forum of high-level exchange between the countries of the EHEA and countries outside of it, the programme should be structured to bring the Ministers together as much as possible. Therefore, to ensure a real political dialogue between the EHEA and non-EHEA Ministers the participants pointed at the need to have more joint sessions and less parallel and not interconnected sessions. To do so, the programme should be thought carefully and such aspects of the overall theme should be brought up which would enable EHEA Ministers and partner country Ministers to have a joint discussion on more topics.

However, a limited number of parallel sessions were also deemed necessary. It was suggested that each parallel session be introduced by a keynote speaker who would set the scene for the topic, present its state of play and challenges ahead. For this purpose, it was proposed to identify keynote speakers and topics they would address by the January BFUG meeting. In general, the topics of the 2015 Ministerial Conference and BPF would be reconsidered and presented at the Riga meeting. There is a need to be clear and precise when suggesting the topics in order to avoid any undesirable interpretations.

On the issue of how to attract more Ministers to Yerevan, the participants were convinced that the ample opportunity for the Ministers to have bilateral meetings with their counterparts might serve for this purpose. Hence, the organisers were requested to provide more space and time for this kind of meetings and have a clear indication for these in the programme.

Finally, the BFUG was unanimous around the issue of further establishing a permanent dialogue with different regions of the world. This would entail on-going work programmes and follow-up measures with different regions in between the Bologna Policy Fora. This could be a message to convey to the countries that would not be involved in the Fourth BPF.

Armenia agreed to amend the agenda based on the feedback from the BFUG. In particular, a careful consideration would be given to increase the number of joint sessions, but still allowing for enough time for parallel sessions. The Ministers would also have more chances for bilateral meetings. As for the topics of the programme, the Secretariat would circulate a list of possible themes to the BFUG with a deadline to respond. Afterwards the programme would be amended accordingly.

**The Chair, Mr. Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) concluded that a number of comments made by the BFUG towards revising the draft programme were accepted, including the one on the need to provide opportunities for joint sessions between the EHEA Ministers and their counterparts from other regions. The BFUG members were encouraged to submit written comments and suggestions on the draft programme. The discussion on the agenda point would continue at the next BFUG meeting on 26-27 January 2015 in Riga.**

## **12. Update on the EHEA accession**

Documents: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_12a [Application of Kosovo<sup>1</sup> to the EHEA membership]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_12b [Application of the NKR to the EHEA membership]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_12c [Application of the Republic of Belarus to the EHEA membership]

The Chair, Mr. Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) informed the BFUG that 3 applications for the EHEA accession had been received from Belarus, Kosovo and, Nagorno-Karabakh. The BFUG was reminded that there are two criteria for membership: a) an applicant country needs to be a party to the European Cultural Convention; and b) its competent public authorities need to commit to and implement the values, goals and key policies of the EHEA.

The first criterion is rather straightforward. However, in order to find out whether the countries satisfy the second criterion, there is a need to assess the reports presented by the applicants.

Thus, the Chair invited Mr. Sjur Bergan (CoE) to update the BFUG on the European Cultural Convention as well as the BFUG to agree how to assess the reports of the applicants.

The BFUG was briefed that Belarus is a party to the European Cultural Convention, so the application should be assessed. As for Nagorno-Karabakh, the latter lacks state recognition and is not a prospective party to the Convention, therefore its application would not be evaluated.

Concerning Kosovo at present it is not a party to the European Cultural Convention, however there is unconfirmed information that there might be movement before the Yerevan Ministerial Conference. Thus, it was suggested to appoint a small group of experts to assess the material content of the application of Belarus as well as Kosovo on the express understanding that this is to ensure that the BFUG is in the position to act should Kosovo become party to the Convention before the Conference, as was the case for the accession of Kazakhstan in 2010. The group might be composed of 3-4 BFUG members and the CoE can provide advice.

At the same time it should be considered that there is also a political implication as it happened before the Bucharest Conference, i.e. the application of Belarus had been assessed but it was not considered due to the political reasons.

Therefore, two parallel processes are needed a) assessment of the applications; and b) the BFUG members need to seek political advice from their political authorities on how to take decision on the application of Belarus as well as clarify their position with regard to Kosovo should this be the case.

Moreover, the BFUG agreed that the alternative reports should also be taken into consideration by the group assessing the reports and asked the Secretariat to circulate to the BFUG members the alternative report concerning Belarus which was received by the Secretariat as well as contact Magna Carta observatory for the alternative report which was received by ESU.

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<sup>1</sup> All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

**The BFUG decided to ask the Holy See, Italy, Iceland, and Latvia, as current and incoming Co-Chairs of the BFUG, Armenia as the Vice-Chairs as well as the Secretariat to prepare recommendations to the BFUG as concerns the applications of Belarus and Kosovo, and took note of the offer by the Council of Europe to assist in preparing recommendations to the BFUG.**

### **13. Selection of the host for the Ministerial Conference in 2018**

Documents: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_13a [Application of France\_FR]  
BFUG\_IT\_VA\_42\_13b [Application of France\_EN]

The Chair, Mr. Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) informed the BFUG that two countries – France and Georgia - had applied to host the 2018 Ministerial Conference (MC). The BFUG was reminded about the procedure and criteria for the selection of the 2018 MC Host, which was approved by the BFUG in its September extraordinary meeting in Rome<sup>2</sup>. According to that procedure, the EHEA country (ies) wishing to organise the next MC should have had submitted an official proposal (signed by the Minister responsible for HE in the country) to the Secretariat by 1 November 2014. The proposal should contain an indication of how many and which languages the applicant country could provide simultaneous interpretation for the 2018 MC as well as include other organisational details. If two or more candidatures were submitted, the election process would follow the voting procedures (as described in the annexes mentioned below). The BFUG would make its recommendation to the Ministers regarding the next host of MC at its Riga meeting on 26-27 January 2015.

Furthermore, it was explained that since no application had been received by the initial deadline of 1 November 2014, based on the decision of the Co-Chairs the deadline had been extended to 14 November 2014<sup>3</sup>.

Ms. Patricia Pol (France) and Ms. Elene Jibladze (Georgia) presented respectively France's and Georgia's application for hosting the 2018 MC and the Bologna Secretariat. It was stressed that both countries had a strong political commitment to host the 2018 MC.

Intensive discussions took place revolving around two main issues: i) the applications of Georgia and France in terms of the completeness of the information provided and how to proceed with the applications and ii) the expectations for the setup of the Secretariat in the period after 2018.

On the first issue, the BFUG appreciated the political commitment of France and Georgia to organise the 2018 Ministerial Conference and host the Secretariat. However, the BFUG advised that the two candidate countries for hosting the Conference and the Secretariat should supplement their applications by providing more details on how they would organise the

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<sup>2</sup> Please, see the documents BFUG\_IT\_VA\_41\_11\_Proposal for the selection procedure of the 2018 Ministerial Conference, BFUG\_IT\_VA\_41\_11\_Annex1, and BFUG\_IT\_VA\_41\_11\_Annex2

<sup>3</sup> Both applications arrived after the extended deadline of 14 November 2014. Though the French application letter was dated 14 November 2014, the French Minister was able to sign the letter only on 15 November. As for Georgia, a non-official letter of interest was sent to the Secretariat on 2 November 2014 and when informed that an official application was required, Georgia set out to prepare an official application and managed to submit it on 26 November 2014, a day before the BFUG meeting.

Conference and the Secretariat, as stipulated by the BFUG in its meeting in September 2014. Moreover, they should take into account certain features from the previous discussions (aside from the technical requirements for applications, such as language regime for the Ministerial Conference). For example, they should further consider how to ensure a strong continuity between the current Secretariat, future one and the one following that in terms of the competence and support to the BFUG.

As for the second issue, the BFUG pointed at the need to have a common understanding of what the role of the Secretariat should be in the future. Many BFUG members were in favour of the Secretariat with an international setup and highlighted that the Secretariat should be more stable and sustainable and even decoupled from the Ministerial Conference host country. As a long-term goal, the members of the Secretariat could be selected by the BFUG to serve for a longer period, e.g. for 5 years and selected in a way to make sure the Secretariat properly reflected the wide range of concerns across the EHEA. And one of the new tasks for such a Secretariat could be the enhancement of communication with non-EHEA countries.

The BFUG noted that the momentum of the previous discussions on the issue should not be lost, but at the same time the BFUG acknowledged that it might be too early to have an international Secretariat selected in a completely different way. Hence the ideas expressed would be used towards the creation of the Secretariat in the period after 2018.

**The Chair, Mr. Friedrich Bechina (Holy See) concluded that both of the applications had been submitted after the second deadline of 14 November 2014 and neither could be considered complete. Nevertheless, the candidature of both of the countries was accepted. Thus, the two candidate countries were invited to come back with a new and more worked-out proposal(s) by the deadline of 12 January 2015.**

**As agreed by the BFUG during its extraordinary meeting in Rome on 18 – 19 September 2014<sup>4</sup>, the BFUG would make its recommendation to the Ministers regarding the next host of MC at its Riga meeting on 26-27 January 2015.**

#### **14. AOB**

Mr. Gottfried Bacher (Austria) on behalf of Mr. Josef Leidenfrost, the Austrian Student Ombudsman, provided brief information to the BFUG on the European Network for Ombudsmen in Higher Education (ENOHE). It was noted that 20 countries have been offering ombudsing services and 8 of them on the basis of laws. Among the main services offered by ombudsmen is to serve as independent neutral institutions to whom, students and staff, faculty and/or administrators can turn in an informal manner for help with issues and complains, aiming at resolving problems in an informal manner, primarily through mediation, some of them also launching an investigation into a complaint concluding with a formal decision. The main issues of ombudsing are maladministration, mobbing, discrimination, recognition issues, national and international mobility issues, and permeability between higher education sectors.

ENOHE held its annual conference in Warsaw in May 2014, which resulted in the Warsaw Resolution. The resolution came up with a recommendation in a very condensed form either for the Yerevan Communiqué stating that national laws regulating universities and other higher

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<sup>4</sup> Please, see the documents: BFUG\_IT\_VA\_41\_11\_Proposal for the selection procedure of the 2018 Ministerial Conference, BFUG\_IT\_VA\_41\_11\_Annex1, BFUG\_IT\_VA\_41\_11\_Annex2

education institutions within the EHEA should stipulate the importance of the creation of independent ombudsmen or ombudsman-type offices to handle issues and concerns. For the Riga meeting, further information would be sent out to the BFUG with this regard.

**The Chair thanked the BFUG members for their fruitful discussions and contributions.**