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AD HOC TASK FORCE TO INCREASE SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE EHEA, THE HIGHER EDUCATION DIMENSION OF THE EEA AND THE ERA

Second Meeting, Hosted by European Commission, Online*
Monday, November 12, 2021
10.00-12.00 (Brussels time)

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Austria	Susanne	Buck
Belgium Flemish Community	Liesbeth	Hens
Belgium French Community	Marc	Vanholsbeeck
Council of Europe	Katia	Dolgova-Dreyer
Denmark	Jonas Husum	Johannesen
Estonia	Kristi	Raudmäe
EUA - European University Association	Thomas	Jorgensen
EURASHE	Armando	Pires
European Commission (Co-chair)	Tine	Delva
European Commission	Stijn	Delaure
Finland	Jonna	Korhonen
France	Carle	Bonafous- Murat
Greece	Lina	Ioannou
Malta	Adam	Liwak
North Macedonia	Borcho	Aleksov
Norway	Jana	Weidemann
Romania	Irina	Geanta
Slovenia	Dusa	Marjetic
Switzerland	Suzanne	Monnier
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Enida	Bezhani
BFUG Secretariat	Patrik	Bardhi
BFUG Secretariat	Alesia	Gegushi

EI-ETUCE, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom did not participate in the meeting.

***Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online.

Albanian BFUG Secretariat 2021-2024

1. Welcome by the co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Task Force

Tine Delva (Co-chair) welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Task Force (TF). The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes and the minutes of the first TF meeting were approved without additional remarks. Ms. Delva then moved on to the main topic of discussion on the agenda, the proposal for synergies. She indicated that a proposal of the group's mandate has been formulated to present to the BFUG by early December. This plan was developed based on the outcomes of the first TF meeting, by incorporating as many of the suggestions as feasible. The document was shared online with the members of the group and feedback was received on it. These suggestions consisted of improvements to the text, and the whole document was favorably received by the members.

2. First draft proposal on synergies EHEA – EEA - ERA

Following the presentation of the draft proposal, members discussed how to further increase synergies between the three entities. Due to the fact that the proposal will be presented at the BFUG meeting, it was discussed whether these entities would collaborate on an equal footing and who would bring the proposal to the European Commission. It was suggested that the plan be given additional reflection and that it be evaluated on three levels: exchanging information, facilitating parallel conversations, and facilitating common decisions. One action could be to keep track of what's going on in the EHEA, EEA, and ERA on the various themes. Furthermore, it is critical to interact with other groups about their work in order to avoid duplicating work done by other WGs. A remark was made that the proposal was based on the existing state of the ERA governance structure, disregarding the fact that the governance will change in two months, to which the co-chair stated that they would have to be open to future ERA changes. From an implementation level, it would be good to have representatives from different WGs, but it was stated that new proposed structure ought to be carefully designed, as new representatives could lead to a more complex managing of the group.

Concerning its topical areas, the proposal should be in line with the suggestions made by the ERA and EEA subgroups. Further discussions with the subgroups "ERA Forum for Transition" and "ERA Forum Subgroup of Higher Education" should be conducted on topics for closer cooperation. A comment was made to also focus on gender equality and inclusiveness, as it is a topic that potentially concerns all 3 entities. Concrete perspectives ought to be offered in the years to come, and apart from the listed topics, emphasis should be also placed to the objectives in the next two to three years to formulate tangible proposals and topics for the next three years. To achieve results, the topical areas were suggested to be combined with the coordination and cooperation methods suggested in the text. However, there is a risk that the text might become too prescriptive and the duplication of the work of the WGs might arise because of this. The section of creating new structures in the proposal was not encouraged by the majority of members, hence it was suggested to be removed. Ms. Delva (Co-chair) underlined that the time frame should encompass the work on synergies until 2024, with the option to extend it if necessary. She mentioned whether the group should specify exactly what

has to be done or leave some opportunity for the entities to form synergies. The framework conditions and system transformation were considered very significant to the process and it was suggested whether additional sets of goals should be developed for specific topics. As the draft proposal suggests strategies to coordinate policy across the three areas, it was proposed that a section detailing the goals of cooperation and synergies achieved be included.
The level of detail and depth of the topics included in the proposal ought to be specified. To this, it was advised to be more prescriptive on the topical areas by giving examples concerning best practice sharing or reform process. It was suggested that a network be formed with other groups working on the same themes so that the results of their work may be shared. It was also suggested to refrain from proposing specific examples about concrete groups for the years to come since at this stage is more important to put forward a list, to be defined by the BFUG. The list of topical areas is a good balance between specific topics of interest and broad objectives, and concrete examples should be defined in the beginning of 2022, not presently.
A road map for the next two years was proposed, to keep the topical areas open and engage with different structures to gather feedback and suggestions on how to proceed in many areas such as policymaking and information exchange, in order to produce a specific proposal about policymaking.

Ms. Delva requested that some BFUG delegates be invited to meetings of the EEA and/or ERA structures in circumstances where topical areas are not covered by working structures. The objective is for WG representatives to allocate one or two persons to participate in EEA and ERA activities, as it is critical to collaborate in synergy and work together on policy development. When there are no groups to deal with topical areas, it is not essential to invite the entire group and construct a parallel structure in the BFUG. Nonetheless, it should be brought to the BFUG's attention that, where appropriate, Bologna working structures should be able to send a delegate or representative to pertinent meetings. The importance of a framework condition that does not contradict with the national framework and institutional autonomy was stressed. It is possible that delegates from ERA or EEA will be unable to attend a meeting; therefore, a framework condition derived from the outputs of this TF is required to allow for the exchange of synergies/delegates. ERA should be made aware of the BFUG groups in order to identify required links that may be formed, as the conclusions concerning the ERA policy agenda with concrete steps for execution will be finished on November 26. As a result, it's critical to figure out the optimum manner for the three areas to share information (i.e., through a platform). Furthermore, it was suggested that the BFUG Secretariat keep the TF updated by distributing information about the activities of the WGs internally for targeted discussions to be set up among EHEA-EEA-ERA, in order to build some kind of cooperation between the three areas. Using the EHEA website as a starting point, public materials can be used to make EEA/ERA issues apparent to EHEA groups. Another idea is to ask each WG to identify concrete topics that would be useful, and then the TF can advise to the WGs to integrate a representative for a certain topic to participate in joint events/spaces, seminars, and so on. The notion of using a platform was thoroughly debated, with Ms. Delva concluding that it may not be required to create a new platform because it would mostly be used to exchange ideas and not to share documents. The information discussed among the three areas should be easily accessible at any time by everybody involved in strategic plans or thematic issues. The Co-chair stressed

that in the proposed draft, it has been determined to inform not only the BFUG, but also the various WGs on a regular basis. It shall be specified in the text that WGs should designate 1-2 delegates to be informed on anything that is linked to the debate with other members in close cooperation. Moreover, the EEA site is also working on a new portal that will be available in 2022 and will help with information sharing.

As a more synergistic title, it was suggested that 'Academic Research Careers' be renamed to 'Research Careers inside Academia.' Rather than separating HEIs and Research Centers, this rephrasing could lead to research centers within HEIs playing a role in international cooperation, hence increasing synergies. However, it was pointed out that the existing assessments place far too much emphasis on research papers in a specific field, neglecting to account for disciplinary and teaching activities. As a result, the wording/phrasing should be carefully formulated to ensure that it is heading in the right direction. Furthermore, it was suggested that the phrase not be too concrete so as not to bind any potential synergies. Although some countries have HEIs with research bodies and powerful public research centers, there are no research career paths in academia, according to one example. Professors focus mostly on teaching because research is not a distinct professional path. Furthermore, research centers are more connected to the ecosystem than academia. Synergies between HEIs and public research institutions should be developed so that research becomes a distinctive career path within the academic community.

To conclude, Ms. Delva summarized this meeting's advancements as follows:

- Annex tables (on the structures) ought to be linked better with the identified topical areas, so that it is clear for the working groups where to add their contribution to the TF;
- It should be requested to the EEA and ERA to take the proposal forward once approved by the BFUG so that these entities can operationalize the points in the proposal;
- The role of the WGs should be clearly defined so that a request can be made at the BFUG for the co-chairs of the working structures to take the work further;
- To ensure that there is information flow between the two areas, it was suggested that the work from EEA and ERA be displayed on the EHEA website, maybe through a small section containing references to the most up-to-date EEA and ERA work.
- Regarding the roadmap, it was suggested that the WGs submit a report on synergies, collaboration, and difficulties to the BFUG for assessment at the conclusion of each year so that the BFUG may provide additional guidance to the WGs to lead the work.

3. Closing words and next steps by the co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Task Force

It was determined that the draft proposal would be distributed to members, who would have until November 17 to make their final comments, after which the co-chairs would send a final version to the members via email with their comments integrated. Ms. Delva concluded the conversation by stating that the comments should be integrated by November 19 and a proposal should be delivered to the BFUG.

The Head of the Secretariat, Enida Bezhani, announced that she has resigned her post and expressed her gratitude to all the colleagues for their continued support and cooperation. No further business was discussed, thus the co-chairs thanked everyone for their participation and concluded the second meeting of the TF.