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Ministry of Science
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MINISTRY
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Suggestions from the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue for the Global Policy Forum to be held in November 2020

The Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue has been working over the past two years to organise to the best of its abilities the 'Global Policy Forum' which was to be integrated, as a central aspect, in the EHEA's Ministerial Conference in June, now postponed until 19-20 November.

The Coordination Group and its objectives are a result of the Paris Ministerial Conference and Bologna Policy Forum, from which emerged the increasing need for high level and constant dialogue among world regions and countries in order to share and develop useful strategies for higher education.

The change in name, from Bologna Policy Forum to Global Policy Forum, and the ambitions for the upcoming Rome Ministerial Conference, signalled the new importance attributed to dialogue among the world regions, and the desire of the EHEA to promote a new and stronger kind of global cooperation, also in view of the shared objective of realizing the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals, and higher education's necessary contribution to all of them.

To achieve our aims in October 2019 we held an event in Rome to which the cultural attachés of the embassies located in Rome were invited to discuss topics of common interest (and to alert them and their governments about the future Global Policy Forum), and a 'soirée for the ambassadors themselves, again with the objective of alerting their governments to the importance of the planned Forum.

On the basis of the October event, we elaborated a format for the Global Policy Forum which included brief keynotes and parallel sessions on six topics, which were discussed and approved by the BFUG. The CG's subgroups, in the past months, have been working on concept notes, questions, speakers and possible formats for the Global Policy Forum plenary and for the parallel session, and also for the CG's planned session in the Global Summit on Higher Education (planned to look at the impact of Covid-19 on higher education).

At the CG meeting, on-line, held on 4 June, the BFUG Vice Chair stated that although the formal decision had not yet been communicated, it was to be understood that the November Ministerial Conference will be held either in virtual form or, if possible, with a limited number of persons present, and all others participating virtually, 'virtual' to be understood as utilizing very advanced and innovation technological means. The Global Summit will be postponed to 2021.

This unforeseen turn of events means that the existing plan must be either modified and adapted to the new situation, or abandoned and replaced by something different. As a result the CG decided to dedicate its meeting to intensive brainstorming, to look freely at options and the consequences thereof, with a view to making one or more proposals to the BFUG about possible formats and content.

The CG initially focussed on the difficulties of involving ministers in a long virtual meeting. The 'slot' planned for the Global Policy Forum (afternoon of 19 November) seemed problematic, because it would make difficult participation from eastern Asia. The length of the planned Forum also seemed excessive, for a virtual meeting. Many proposals were considered, including holding the 6 parallel sessions before or after the Rome meeting, and one after another rather than in parallel; some suggested moving the entire Forum to 2021; other formats were explored.

Eventually a degree of consensus emerged, that there could be a meeting, not too long (2 hours/2.5 hours maximum) of the Forum, in conjunction with the 'Rome' Ministerial conference, around midday, in such a way that Ministers from eastern Asia and from the Americas -- sacrificing themselves a little --- would be able see each other and interact with each other.

After further reflection and discussion, the CG for GDP proposes a number of alternatives, to be evaluated per se and on the basis of further clarification (if forthcoming) about the plans for the 'Rome' Ministerial, and about the technical constraints and opportunities thereof:

1. Adhere as closely as possible to the existing plan, although in virtual or blended form:

Plenary virtual meeting including EHEA and non-EHEA Ministers during the November Ministerial Conference as planned. This includes keynotes (Italian Minister, Jeffrey Sachs), and space for the Ministers attending to make brief statements. The keynotes and other materials might be presented (virtually) beforehand. The 6 parallel sessions would take place through an online format.

The advantage of this choice would be to confirm that Global Policy Dialogue is really an EHEA priority, and even an emergency, such as the COVID -19 crisis, emphasizes our common interests and need to reinforce dialogue. On the other hand this option is almost impossible taking into account the different timezones around the world.

2. Use the existing plan as a basis, but modify it with a view to optimizing participation

The centrality of the Global Policy Forum with regard to the Ministerial Meeting could be emphasized by giving the GPF a (virtual) space as planned during the Ministerial Meeting, but modifying the schedule so that it falls in the central hours of 19 or 20 November, to facilitate participation by Ministers from all time zones. The plenary virtual meeting would take place during a shorter Forum meeting with brief keynotes and a space for the Ministers attending to make brief statements. The number of parallel sessions could be cut from 6 to 3.

In this case the parallel sessions might be:

1. Building trust in a global context with mobility of persons, minds, knowledge
2. Inclusion with untapped talents as a driver for excellence
3. Innovation, learning and teaching new skills for lifelong learning and employability

Interaction between ministers was one of the main goals of the originally planned parallel sessions, but this might become quite difficult in a short online format.

3. Abolish the parallel sessions

Plenary virtual meeting including EHEA and non-EHEA Ministers at a short Forum meeting including brief keynotes (Italian Minister, Jeffrey Sachs), and space for the Ministers attending to make brief statements. The keynotes and other materials might be presented (virtually) beforehand.

In this case the parallel sessions would not be held, and the prospects of building on the work achieved so far transferred to future occasions.

4. Keep the Global Forum within the Ministerial Conference but hold the parallel sessions before and/or after

If possible the parallel sessions could be held in the weeks before the Ministerial Conference as a kind of 'build-up'. Alternatively some sessions could be organised before 'Rome' and some after, or else all six after. Opting for this last option could keep the cooperation between EHEA and non-EHEA ministers active between ministerial conferences. Sessions at different times could involve either persons from one geographic macro-region or else mixing people from different macro-regions. An argument against this solution is that if Ministers do not participate, it is not worth doing it. A counterproposal is to ask a certain number of representative Ministers from various world areas to 'chair' or to be speakers, and invite others to intervene.

5. Postpone part or all of the Global Policy Forum to coincide with the "Global Summit" to be held in 2021.

On the afternoon of 20 November and on 21 November a number of events were planned as a "Global Summit". Italy has now postponed this until a date to be decided in 2021, and to be held in Italy. It may be possible to hold a special Global Policy Forum in conjunction with the "Summit". This might include both plenary and parallel sessions on the topics already chosen, with physical presence of ministers. This option would facilitate the setup of the GPF as originally foreseen in the existing plan and have real interaction between ministers. However, it would not preserve the link between the GPF and the regular EHEA Ministerial conference.