

Background Note on the issue of the BFUG co-chairmanship of Belarus foreseen for autumn 2022

1. ESU, supported by EUA, EURASHE, and ENQA, has asked the BFUG to consider whether the Belarus co-chairmanship of the BFUG foreseen for July - December 2022, should go ahead as planned in view of the situation in Belarus, notably in view of the impact this situation has on the academic community. They asked the BFUG to suspend the Belarus co-chairmanship. By implication, Belarus would then also not be a member of the Bologna Board January 2022 – June 2023, as, in the case of Co-Chairs, membership of the Board also comprises the semester preceding and following the semester in which a given country holds the rotating co-chairmanship.
2. On October 21, the Bologna Board decided to include the proposal to suspend the Belarus co-chairmanship on the agenda of the meeting of the BFUG to be held on December 1 – 2, 2021. The Co-chairs and Vice-chair agreed that Belarus should be unofficially informed on the Board decision and the Vice-chair unofficially inquired with Belarus if they would voluntarily resign their place in the order of Co-chairmanship. Belarus, again unofficially, responded negatively to the inquiry.
3. As precedence, the order of non-EU Co-chairmanships has been modified at least on three previous occasions, namely when Albania accepted to hold the Bologna Vice-chairmanship; when it was clear that the UK would leave the EU and when the Holy See was allowed to co-chair with Italy. In all those cases there was broad agreement on the proposed modifications, and all countries involved agreed to the proposals.
4. On November 18, 2020, the BFUG Co-chairs prepared a Statement on the situation in Belarus, which was signed by 24 BFUG member states and 6 consultative members, no consensus could be reached on how to react because of different interpretations on the principle of non-interference. The statement and the list of countries supporting it was published with the materials of the Rome Ministerial conference, November 19, 2020.
5. In the probable case, that the consensus will not be reached, the decision will have to be taken through a vote. The rules of procedures do not foresee a situation in which the BFUG is faced with a decision to suspend a member State's Co-Chairmanship. As the rules of procedure do not explicitly cover the present issue, they also do not stipulate that any such decision be made by qualified majority. It must therefore be assumed that the decision is to be made by simple majority. Each member country and EC will have two votes. The ballot will be secret. The outcome will be based on a simple majority of the number of votes cast. In the event of a tie, there will be a second round. In the unlikely event of a further tie, the Chairs will draw lots.
6. Should the proposal to suspend the Belarus co-chairmanship be adopted, the BFUG may wish to decide until when the Belarus co-chairmanship is postponed. BFUG may postpone the Belarus chairmanship until the end of Work Programme 2020-2024 and take further decisions on the next Ministerial Conference hosted by Albania.
7. Should the BFUG reject the proposal to suspend the Belarus co-chairmanship of the BFUG, the country will co-chair in autumn 2022, as foreseen. The BFUG could, however, stipulate that while Belarus will co-chair the BFUG, the meeting should not be held in Belarus.