



1 **Draft 5xxx of the Rome Ministerial Communiqué as of 10 July 2020**

2 We, the Ministers responsible for higher education, meeting [in Rome and] online on 19-20
3 November 2020, celebrate the achievements of the past 21 years since the signing of the Bologna
4 Declaration. We reaffirm our commitment to developing a more inclusive, innovative,
5 interconnected and resilient European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

6 The EHEA is a unique cooperation where public authorities and higher education stakeholders work
7 together to define and achieve shared goals. Thanks to the diversity of our cultures, languages and
8 environments, and to our shared commitment to quality, transparency and mobility, our higher
9 education systems offer Europe and the world unequalled opportunities for learning, teaching,
10 research and innovation.

11 Our societies are facing unprecedented challenges connected with the worldwide spread of COVID-
12 19 and its consequences. The pandemic has shown how interdependent we are, and how vulnerable
13 we can be. It has made evident that we are all part of one world, where human solidarity is an
14 imperative.

15 We are determined to enable higher education institutions to help our societies address the
16 multiple threats to global peace, democratic values, freedom of information, health and wellbeing
17 -- not least those created or exacerbated by the pandemic. We are committed to overcoming the
18 social inequities that still limit the achievement of a fully inclusive EHEA [*These paragraphs to be
19 expanded and modified in view of of the Board discussion on COVID and what happens in the coming
20 two months*]

21 Digitalization has allowed most of our systems to continue to function during the global emergency,
22 although the intensified use of digital means has brought to light a number of limits. Higher
23 education, with its outstanding knowledge capital and consolidated experience of transnational and
24 international cooperation and research, must take a leading role in exploring how to overcome
25 these difficulties.

26 It is therefore all the more important that we look with determination and optimism towards 2030,
27 confident that we will succeed in fostering more effective cooperation and closer dialogue among
28 our countries, our higher education systems and institutions and with the broader higher education
29 community.

30 In view of our established criteria and an agreed roadmap for implementation, we are pleased to
31 welcome San Marino as a new Member of the EHEA.

32 **Our Vision**

33 We envision the EHEA of the future as an area where students, staff and graduates can move freely
34 to study, teach and do research. **The EHEA of our vision will fully respect the fundamental values
35 of higher education and democracy and the rule of law.** It will encourage critical thinking, the free
36 circulation of knowledge and expand the opportunities offered by technological development for
37 research-based learning and teaching. It will ensure that our higher education systems offers all

38 learners equality of opportunities in accordance with their potential and aspirations. We recognize
39 that accomplishing this will require enacting policies and implementing measures in our national
40 frameworks, some of which will go beyond our higher education systems and will entail alignment
41 with wider national economic, financial and social strategies.

42 We commit to fulfilling our vision by 2030, building an inclusive, innovative and interconnected
43 EHEA to underpin a sustainable, cohesive and peaceful Europe:

- 44 - **Inclusive**, because every learner will have equitable access to higher education and will be
45 fully supported in completing their studies and training;
- 46 - **Innovative**, because it will introduce new and better aligned learning, teaching and
47 assessment methods and practices, closely linked to research;
- 48 - **Interconnected**, because our shared frameworks and tools will continue to facilitate and
49 enhance international cooperation and reform, exchange of knowledge and mobility of staff
50 and students.

51 Higher education will be a key actor in **meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development**
52 **Goals (SDGs) by 2030**. We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in bringing their
53 educational, research and innovation capacities to bear on these fundamental global objectives.

54 Higher education institutions have the potential to drive major change – improving the knowledge,
55 skills and competences of students and society to tackle sustainability, environmental protection
56 and other crucial concerns. Moving towards climate neutrality is essential for all of us. Higher
57 education must not only prepare learners for new “green” jobs and activities by offering up-skilling
58 and reskilling opportunities, but also enable them to develop and apply new technologies and
59 approaches.

60 **Quality education** will continue to be the hallmark of the EHEA and form the basis for the full
61 achievement of personal and professional capabilities, general wellbeing and prosperity. A robust
62 culture of **academic and scientific integrity** that blocks all forms of academic fraud and distortion
63 of scientific truth, will be supported by all higher education institutions and all public authorities.

64 **Fundamental Values**

65 We reaffirm our commitment to promoting and protecting the **fundamental values in the entire**
66 **EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation** as an indispensable foundation for
67 quality learning, teaching and research as well as for democratic societies. We commit to upholding
68 institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher
69 education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education

70 We ask the BFUG to develop a **framework** for the enhancement of the fundamental values of the
71 EHEA that will foster self-reflection, constructive dialogue and peer-learning across national
72 authorities, higher education institutions and organisations, while also making it possible to assess
73 the degree to which these are honoured and implemented in our systems. We adopt the **definition**
74 **of academic freedom** as freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research, teaching,
75 learning and communication in and with society without fear of reprisal (**Annex 1**).

76 We reaffirm our commitment to fostering ethics, transparency and integrity in and through
77 education and research and note that the Council of Europe's Platform on Ethics, Transparency and
78 Integrity in Education (ETINED) offers the possibility for all EHEA members, consultative members
79 and partners to cooperate to reach this goal.

80 **Building the Future**

81 - **An inclusive EHEA**

82 **Socially inclusive higher education** will remain at the core of the EHEA and will entail providing
83 opportunities and support for equitable inclusion of individuals from all parts of society. Learners
84 with diverse socio-economic, professional, cultural and educational backgrounds must have the
85 possibility and the tools to seek out and avail themselves, at any time of life, of the educational
86 options most useful for them.

87 We commit to reinforcing social inclusion and enhancing quality education, using fully the new
88 opportunities provided by digitalization. While our countries increasingly rely on innovative
89 technologies and Artificial Intelligence, we must ensure that these observe ethical standards and
90 human rights and do not have negative consequences in terms of inclusion. We recognize that
91 digitalization does not offer 'one size fits all' solutions, and ask the BFUG to propose ways in which
92 all learners can benefit from the new technologies.

93 We adopt the "**Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education
94 in the EHEA**" (Annex 2) and commit to implementing them in our systems. We endorse the
95 broadened definition of Social Dimension, and will engage in wide-ranging policy dialogue on how
96 to implement the principles and guidelines fully at national level. We will support our higher
97 education institutions in integrating them into their institutional culture and core higher education
98 missions: learning and teaching, research and innovation, knowledge circulation and outreach,
99 institutional governance and management. We ask the BFUG to report back to us in 2024 on the
100 concrete steps taken and the related monitoring measures to assure an evidence-based follow-up.

101 We recognize the importance of safeguarding the rights of students through legislation as well as
102 through arrangements to further these rights in practice, such as the institution of student
103 ombudspersons or similar solutions that already exist in many EHEA countries. We commit to
104 enabling such arrangements within our countries and higher education systems and will encourage
105 cooperation within the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE).

106 - **An innovative EHEA**

107 **Swift up-dating of knowledge, skills and competences** will be required to respond to the challenges
108 and develop the opportunities that the new decade will bring. Needs will grow for **innovative and
109 critical thinking**, emotional intelligence, leadership, teamwork and problem solving abilities, as well
110 as enterprising attitudes. Higher education institutions will need to continue to diversify their
111 learning offer and innovate in contents and modes of delivery.

112 **Flexible and open learning paths**, part of the original inspiration for the Bologna Process, are
113 important aspects of **student-centered learning** and are in increasing demand in our societies. In
114 addition to full degree programmes, many higher education institutions are offering or may offer
115 **smaller units of learning**, which enable learners to develop or update their cultural, professional,
116 and transversal competences at various stages in their lives. We ask the BFUG to explore how and
117 to what extent these **smaller, flexible units, including those leading to micro-credentials**, can be
118 defined, developed and implemented by our institutions using EHEA tools.

119 We [*acknowledge/adopt: to be decided*] the "**Recommendations for national/governmental
120 support/action for the enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA**"
121 (Annex 3) to support higher education institutions in further developing student-centered learning
122 and teaching. The recommendations comprise increased support for all learners, and for teaching
123 and non-teaching staff. Academic staff, including junior academics, require stable employment and
124 career opportunities, parity of esteem for teaching and research, attractive working conditions,
125 access to up-to-date staff development, and recognition of their achievements. In all these respects

126 we will foster dialogue and collaboration on learning and teaching in our national systems and at
127 EHEA level.

128 We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in using digital technologies for learning,
129 teaching and assessment, as well as for academic communication and research, and to investing in
130 the **development of digital skills and competences for all**. We commit to the development of open
131 science and education to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and **openly licensed materials** that
132 can be easily shared among higher education stakeholders, who can adapt and repurpose them for
133 their needs.

134 We support our higher education institutions in intensifying their search for **solutions to the**
135 **challenges our societies face**. The **social, human and creative sciences and arts** must continue to
136 play their vital role, giving depth to our lives and enabling us to understand and address a changing
137 world. Our higher education institutions must engage with their communities to undertake mutually
138 beneficial and socially responsible joint activities.

139 - **An interconnected EHEA**

140 **Cooperation and mobility** connect our systems and foster the development of intercultural and
141 linguistic competences, broader knowledge and understanding of our world. Direct contacts and
142 synergies among our diverse cultures and higher education systems through mobility of staff and
143 students contribute to the excellence and relevance of higher education in the EHEA, making it
144 attractive and competitive on the global scale. We acknowledge the importance and the benefits of
145 physical mobility for students, doctoral candidates and staff. Notwithstanding the current
146 difficulties related to the pandemic, we reaffirm our target that at least **20% of those graduating in**
147 **the EHEA** should have had a study or training period abroad, and **further commit to enabling all**
148 **learners to acquire international and intercultural competences through internationalization of**
149 **the curricula** or participation in **innovative international environments** in their home institutions,
150 **and to experience some form of mobility**, whether in physical, digitally enhanced (virtual) or
151 blended formats.

152 Digital solutions will facilitate secure, efficient and transparent **exchange of data**. Joint digital
153 approaches to enhance recognition, quality assurance and mobility are needed. We ask the BFUG
154 to map existing and find new solutions to enhance the interoperability of digital systems and the
155 exchange of student and institutional data, in full respect of privacy and security.

156 Deeper cooperation between higher education institutions will help to address the above objectives
157 through joint innovative teaching and research. We will strive to eliminate obstacles to cooperation
158 at national levels and to enable all higher education institutions in the EHEA to benefit from it. The
159 alliances formed under the **European Universities' Initiative** constitute one important way of
160 exploring deeper, larger scale systemic cooperation, which can prove helpful for detecting and
161 overcoming the obstacles to closer transnational cooperation by higher education institutions in the
162 future.

163 **Implementation**

164 We take note of the results described in the **Bologna Process Implementation Report** on the
165 progress made over the past two decades... [*this part to be completed in view of the final version of*
166 *the BPIR*]

167 In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing
168 implementation of three "**Key Commitments**" essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the
169 Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma

170 Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*
171 in the *European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.

172 We reconfirm our resolve to fully implement the Key Commitments. We ask the BFUG to continue
173 to employ the **peer support method** to achieve this. We commit our countries to the continued
174 participation in and contribution to this effort.

175 We commit to completing and further developing the **National Qualifications Frameworks**
176 compatible with the **Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education**
177 **Area (QF-EHEA)** and ask the BFUG to continue to update the criteria for self-certification to include
178 a stronger element of peer review of national reports. We mandate the **Network of QF**
179 **correspondents** to continue its work in the coming period, contributing to the further development
180 of the QF-EHEA and the self-certification of national qualifications frameworks against it.

181 We will strengthen the implementation of the **Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition**
182 **Convention** and apply its principles to qualifications and periods of study outside the EHEA, using
183 common assessment criteria and reports, in collaboration with the Lisbon Recognition Convention
184 Committee and the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

185 We must ensure **automatic recognition of academic qualifications and periods of study within the**
186 **EHEA** so that students, staff and graduates are able to move freely to study, teach and do research.
187 We will make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level
188 for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with
189 the ESG and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established. We
190 also encourage the application of agreed and secure systems of digital certification and
191 communication such as blockchain, as well as the further development of the Database of External
192 Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) to facilitate automatic recognition.

193 We commit to reviewing our own legislation, regulations, and practice to ensure fair recognition of
194 qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situations, even
195 when they cannot be fully documented. We welcome the **European Qualifications Passport for**
196 **Refugees** and will support further broadening its use in our systems.

197 We acknowledge the progress made in the development of **quality assurance systems** aligned with
198 the ESG, and we commit to removing the remaining obstacles, including those related to the cross-
199 border operation of EQAR-registered agencies and the application of the European Approach for
200 Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. In view of the need for increased flexibility and openness
201 of learning paths, smaller units of learning and greater synergisms among higher education
202 institutions, we encourage **an enhancement-oriented use of the ESG to support innovation in**
203 **higher education and its quality assurance**. We commit to ensuring that our external quality
204 assurance arrangements cover international higher education with equal standards as for domestic
205 provision.

206 We commit to further developing cooperation with the **European Research Area** and call for the
207 BFUG to continue to work with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) to
208 foster better synergies and alignment between education and research and innovation policies.
209 Focus will be on developing research-based learning, enhancing openness and contributing to
210 meeting the SDGs. [*FI will update this*]

211 We commit to the goal of **building a more closely connected and sustainable higher education**
212 **community**, which fosters inclusion, communication, cooperation, and solidarity, essential for the
213 **relevance and excellence of the future EHEA**. To accomplish this, we commit to keeping our
214 national higher education sectors informed about and involved in EHEA developments, and to

215 working closely with student and university associations and networks on the development and
216 implementation of national reforms. We ask the BFUG to organize EHEA events such as
217 **transnational seminars, workshops and hearings** addressing the wider higher education
218 community (students, academic staff and external stakeholders), to discuss present and future goals
219 and explore collaborative ways to address them.

220 **The EHEA in a global setting**

221 We welcome the adoption of the **UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications**
222 **concerning Higher Education and commit to ratifying it promptly**, in order to facilitate fair
223 recognition of qualifications and periods of study from outside the EHEA, using Lisbon Recognition
224 Convention compliant assessment criteria and reports.

225 We acknowledge the new **Magna Charta Universitatum** and appreciate its inclusion of the global
226 values of diversity, inclusion, social responsibility and university citizenship.

227 Jointly with colleagues who have participated in the **Bologna Global Policy Forum**, we commit to
228 deploy resources to ensure that our higher education systems contribute to the achievement of **the**
229 **UN Sustainable Development Goals**. We look forward to the next Global Policy Forum back to back
230 with the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2024. In meantime we will continue to explore/develop
231 closer dialogue and stronger cooperation with partners around the globe. *[to be adapted according*
232 *to what is decided about the Forum]*

233 **Conclusion**

234 We call on the BFUG to address with vigor the actions and priorities indicated for the next decade
235 with the overall purpose of creating a **European Higher Education Area that fulfills our vision and**
236 **achieves our goals by 2030.**

237 We gratefully accept the offer by Albania to host the next Ministerial Conference of the EHEA and
238 the Bologna Global Policy Forum in Tirana in May or June 2024.

239

240 **Annexes**

- 241 • **“Statement on Academic freedom”**
- 242 • **“Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the**
243 **EHEA”**
- 244 • **“Recommendations for national/governmental support/action for the enhancement of**
245 **Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA”** *[if so decided by the BFUG]*