



## 1 **Draft 6 of the Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 10 September 2020**

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

6 We thank Italy for its key role in preparing and hosting our conference and for having adapted it to  
7 the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

12 Our societies are facing unprecedented challenges connected with the worldwide spread of COVID-  
13 19 and its consequences. The pandemic has shown how interdependent we are, and how vulnerable  
14 we can be. It has made evident that we are all part of one world, where human solidarity is an  
15 imperative. We greatly appreciate and recognize the efforts of the higher education communities  
16 in rising to these challenges and reaffirm our determination to provide inclusive quality higher  
17 education fulfilling its full range of purposes also in times of crisis such as these.

18 We are determined to enable higher education institutions to help our societies address the  
19 multiple threats to global peace, democratic values, freedom of information, health and wellbeing  
20 -- not least those created or exacerbated by the pandemic. We commit, therefor, to continue and  
21 step-up our investment in education, to ensure that universities have sufficient funding to transform  
22 and spearhead the development of solutions for the current crisis, post crisis recovery, and  
23 generally, the transition into green, sustainable and resilient economies and societies

24 We are committed to overcoming the social inequities that still limit the achievement of a fully  
25 inclusive EHEA. Digitalization has allowed most of our systems to continue to function during the  
26 global emergency, although the intensified use of digital means has brought to light a number of  
27 limits. Higher education, with its outstanding knowledge capital and consolidated experience of  
28 transnational and international cooperation and research, must take a leading role in exploring how  
29 to overcome these difficulties.

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

34 We are pleased to welcome San Marino as a new Member of the EHEA. San Marino will be  
35 supported in the implementation of its commitments with an agreed roadmap.

36

## 37 **Our Vision**

38 We envision the EHEA as an area where students, staff and graduates can **move freely** to study,  
39 teach and do research. **The EHEA of our vision will fully respect the fundamental values of higher**  
40 **education and democracy and the rule of law.** It will encourage critical thinking, the free circulation  
41 of knowledge and expand the opportunities offered by technological development for research-  
42 based learning and teaching. It will ensure that our higher education systems offers all learners  
43 equitability of opportunities in accordance with their potential and aspirations. We recognize that  
44 accomplishing this will require enacting policies and implementing measures in our national  
45 frameworks, some of which will go beyond our higher education systems and will entail alignment  
46 of wider national economic, financial and social strategies.

47 To achieve our vision, we commit to building an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by  
48 2030, able to underpin a sustainable, cohesive and peaceful Europe:

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

56 Higher education institutions have the potential to drive major change – improving the knowledge,  
57 skills and competences of students and society to tackle sustainability, environmental protection  
58 and other crucial concerns.

59 Moving towards climate neutrality is essential for all of us. Higher education must not only prepare  
60 learners for new “green” jobs and activities by offering up-skilling and reskilling opportunities, but  
61 also enable them to develop and apply new technologies and approaches. Therefore, higher  
62 education will be a key actor in **meeting the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals**  
63 **(SDGs) by 2030.** We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in bringing their  
64 educational, research and innovation capacities to bear on these fundamental global objectives and  
65 to deploying resources to ensure that our higher education systems contribute to the achievement  
66 of **the SDGs.**

67 **Quality education** will continue to be the hallmark of the EHEA. A robust culture of **academic and**  
68 **scientific integrity** that blocks all forms of academic fraud and distortion of scientific truth, will be  
69 supported by all higher education institutions and all public authorities.

## 70 **Fundamental Values**

71 We reaffirm our commitment to promoting and protecting the **fundamental values in the entire**  
72 **EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation** as an indispensable foundation for  
73 quality learning, teaching and research as well as for democratic societies. We commit to upholding  
74 institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher  
75 education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education *[to be developed in line*  
76 *with the text to be proposed to the Berlin BFUG by the chairing team]*

77 We ask the BFUG to develop a **framework** for the enhancement of the fundamental values of the  
78 EHEA that will foster self-reflection, constructive dialogue and peer-learning across national  
79 authorities, higher education institutions and organisations, while also making it possible to assess

80 the degree to which these are honoured and implemented in our systems. We adopt the **definition**  
81 **of academic freedom** as freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research, teaching,  
82 learning and communication in and with society without fear of reprisal (**Annex 1**).

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

## 87 **Building the Future**

### 88 - **An inclusive EHEA**

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

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

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

108 We recognize the importance of safeguarding student right through legislation; we commit to  
109 instituting and supporting in our national systems dedicated measures and structures to further  
110 them, such as student ombudspersons or similar solutions that already exist in many EHEA  
111 countries. We commit to enabling such arrangements within our countries and higher education  
112 systems and will encourage cooperation within the European Network of Ombuds in Higher  
113 Education (ENOHE).

### 114 - **An innovative EHEA**

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

120 **Swift up-dating of knowledge, skills and competences** will be required to respond to the challenges  
121 and develop the opportunities that the new decade will bring. Higher education institutions will  
122 continue to diversify their learning offer and innovate in contents and modes of delivery in order to

123 respond to growing needs for innovative and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership,  
124 teamwork and problem solving abilities, as well as enterprising attitudes.

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

132 We adopt the **“Recommendations for national/governmental support/action for the**  
133 **enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA” (Annex 3)** and commit to  
134 follow them, supporting support higher education institutions in further implementing student-  
135 centered learning and teaching. The recommendations comprise increased support for all learners,  
136 and for teaching and non-teaching staff. Academic staff, including junior academics, require stable  
137 employment and career opportunities, parity of esteem for teaching and research, attractive  
138 working conditions, access to up-to-date staff development, and recognition of their achievements.  
139 In all these respects we will foster dialogue and collaboration on learning and teaching in our  
140 national systems and at EHEA level.

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

#### 147 - **An interconnected EHEA**

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

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

164 Deeper cooperation between higher education institutions will help to address the above objectives  
165 through joint innovative teaching and research. We will strive to eliminate obstacles to cooperation  
166 at national levels and to enable all higher education institutions in the EHEA to benefit from it. The  
167 alliances formed under the **European Universities' Initiative** constitute one important way of

168 exploring deeper, larger scale systemic cooperation, which can prove helpful for detecting and  
169 overcoming the obstacles to closer transnational cooperation by higher education institutions in the  
170 future.

## 171 **Implementation**

172 We take note of the results described in the **Bologna Process Implementation Report** on the  
173 progress made over the past two decades... *[to be completed with a short sentence in view of the*  
174 *final version of the BPIR]*

175 In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing  
176 implementation of three "**Key Commitments**" essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the  
177 Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma  
178 Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*  
179 in the *European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.

180 We reconfirm our determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented. We ask the BFUG  
181 to continue to employ the **peer support method** to achieve this. We commit to the continued  
182 participation in and contribution to this effort.

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

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

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

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

206 We acknowledge the progress made in the development of **quality assurance systems** aligned with  
207 the ESG, and we commit to removing the remaining obstacles, including those related to the cross-  
208 border operation of EQAR-registered agencies and the application of the European Approach for  
209 Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. In view of the need for increased flexibility and openness  
210 of learning paths, smaller units of learning and greater synergies among higher education  
211 institutions, we encourage **an enhancement-oriented use of the ESG to support innovation in**

212 **higher education and its quality assurance.** We commit to ensuring that our external quality  
213 assurance arrangements cover transnational higher education in the EHEA with equal standards as  
214 for domestic provision.

215 We commit to further developing cooperation with the **European Research Area** and call for the  
216 BFUG to continue to work with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) to  
217 foster better synergies and alignment between education and research and innovation policies.  
218 Focus will be on developing research-based learning, enhancing openness and contributing to  
219 meeting the United Nations SDGs. *[To be updated if needed]*

220 We commit to the goal of **building a more closely connected and sustainable higher education**  
221 **community**, which fosters inclusion, communication, cooperation, and solidarity, essential for the  
222 **relevance and excellence of the future EHEA.** To accomplish this, we commit to keeping our  
223 national higher education sectors informed about and involved in EHEA developments, and to  
224 working closely with student and university associations and networks on the development and  
225 implementation of national reforms. We ask the BFUG to organize EHEA events such as  
226 **transnational seminars, workshops and hearings** addressing the wider higher education  
227 community (students, academic staff and external stakeholders), to discuss present and future goals  
228 and explore collaborative ways to address them.

## 229 **The EHEA in a global setting**

230 We deeply regret that the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to hold the Global Policy Forum  
231 as intended. *[to be adjusted according to how the Rome programme is finalized]* We recommit to  
232 international dialogue on higher education values, policies, and reforms, drawing on the experience  
233 of the EHEA as well as those of other areas of the world, and ask the BFUG to further develop and  
234 strengthen Global Dialogue in the coming work period

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

239 We acknowledge the recently revised **Magna Charta Universitatum** and appreciate its inclusion of  
240 the global values of diversity, inclusion, and social and civic responsibility.

## 241 **Conclusion**

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

245 We gratefully accept the offer by Albania to host the next Ministerial Conference of the EHEA and  
246 the Bologna Global Policy Forum in Tirana in 2024.

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## 248 **Annexes**

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