



Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND SPORT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



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BFUG MEETING

Bratislava (Slovakia), 8/9 December 2016

Minutes

0. List of Participants

Delegation	Surname	First Name(s)
Albania	Pustina	Linda
Andorra	Martínez Ramírez	María del Mar
Armenia	Harutyunyan	Gayane
Armenia	Sukiasyan	Robert
Austria	Bacher	Gottfried
Belarus	Betenya	Elena
Belarus	Rytov	Aliaksandr
Belgium - FR	Vanholsbeeck	Marc
Belgium - NL	Vercruysse	Noël
BFUG Secretariat	Profit	Françoise
BFUG Secretariat	Saad	Mariana
BFUG Secretariat	Steinmann	Marina
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Maric	Petar
Business Europe	Seling	Irene
Council of Europe	Bergan	Sjur
Croatia	Tecilazic Gorsic	Ana
Cyprus	Giorgoudes	Panikos
Czech Republic	Trojanová	Lucie
Denmark	Johannesen	Jonas Husum
Denmark	Nielsen	Jette Søgren
Education International	Vraa Jensen	Jens Christian
ENQA	Kelo	Maria
ENQA	Walsh	Padraig
EQAR	Froment	Eric
EQAR	Tück	Colin

Estonia	Pukk	Janne
Estonia	Rebassoo	Kadi
ESU	Meister	Lea
ESU	Todorovski	Blazhe
ESU	Vikmane	Liva
EUA	Gaebel	Michael
EUA	Wilson	Lesley
EURASHE	Karpíšek	Michal
EURASHE	Lauwick	Stéphane
Euridyce	Crosier	David
European Commission	Andersen	Mette Moerk
European Commission	Tyson	Adam
Finland	Hirsivaara	Sanna Kaarina
France Vice-chair	Pol	Patricia
France	Despreaux	Denis
France	Ott	Marie-Odile
Georgia	Kopaleishvili	Nino
Germany	Michalski	Marius
Germany	Petrikowski	Frank
Greece	Dionysopoulou	Panagiota
Greece	Skouras	Christos
Holy See	Bechina	Friedrich
Holy See	Rosenbaum	Melanie
Hungary	Keszei	Ernő
Iceland	Strand Vidarsdottir	Una
Ireland	Gleeson	Joseph Christopher
Italy	Castellucci	Paola
Kazakhstan	Boiko	Yekaterina
Kazakhstan	Nurmagambetov	Amantay
Latvia	Rauhvargers	Andrejs
Lithuania	Armalyté	Elena
Luxembourg	Kox	Corinne
Malta	Sammut-Bonnici	Tanya
Malta	Sant	Stefan
Malta	Scholz	Christine
Moldova	Velisco	Nadejda
Montenegro Co-Chair	Mišović	Biljana
Netherlands	Bijvank	Tessa
Netherlands	Boselie - Abbenhuis	Floor

Norway	Johansson	Toril
Norway	Strøm	Tone Flood
Poland	Bołtruszeko	Maria
Portugal	Couto	Priscila
Portugal	Gaspar	Maria Filomena
Romania	Haj	Mihai Cezar
Russia	Kamynina	Nadezda
Slovak Republic Co-chair	Jurkovič	Jozef
Slovak Republic	Piovarči	Andrej
Slovenia	Rustja	Erika
Spain	Delgado	Luis
Sweden	Gaunt	Albin
Sweden	Persson	Martin
Switzerland	Studinger	Silvia
UNESCO	Wells	Peter
United Kingdom	Robinson	Rebecca
United Kingdom	Wilkinson	Pamela
External (Consultant, Eurostudent)	Hauschildt	Kristina
External (Speaker, Magna Charta Observatory)	Noorda	Sijbolt
External (Chair of a parallel session, IAU)	Van't Land	Hilligje
External (Chair of a parallel session, Central European University)	Iwinska	Julia
External (Chair of a parallel session, Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts)	Abrahám	Samuel

Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Serbia and Ukraine were not present. Liechtenstein and Turkey had sent in apologies.

1. Welcome and introduction to the meeting

In her welcome address, the State Secretary from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, Oľga Nachtmannová presented the national reforms in Slovakia which are being carried out to ensure full implementation of the Bologna process, and wished the Bologna Follow-up Group a successful meeting.

The outgoing Co-chair from Moldova stated that she felt honoured to have held the presidency together with the Netherlands and organised the Board meeting in 2016. The country is currently reforming higher education (especially quality assurance). The outgoing Co-chair from the Netherlands thanked Montenegro for having organised the meeting in Podgorica and Slovakia for hosting this meeting. A lot of progress has been made since Amsterdam.

The Co-chair from Montenegro thanked the Secretariat for organising the meetings and underlined the special interest that Montenegro as a candidate country for the European Union has in the Bologna process.

The Vice-chair from France thanked the current and the outgoing Co-chairs as well as the incoming Co-chairs. She underlined that this meeting was at the midterm of the working period and is an important step to prepare recommendations for the Ministerial Conference 2018.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

3. Information on the BFUG Board meeting in Podgorica, 24th October 2016

The Co-chair presented main issues of the draft minutes from the Board meeting in Podgorica and explained that the document on fundamental values will serve as starting paper for a discussion at this BFUG meeting.

The Slovakian Co-chair thanked Montenegro for hosting the Board meeting.

The BFUG members took note of the minutes.

4. Adopted proceedings

The Secretariat briefed the participants on the last changes made to the BFUG proceedings.

The Holy See reminded the participants that the Board has to prepare meetings of the BFUG but should not be an executive committee taking decisions on content.

The corrected version of the proceedings with an updated table of the presidency and refined wording for the adoption of the minutes was adopted.

5. Update concerning the AG/WG work

A first discussion highlighted, that the minutes of group meetings have very different character. Some just state that the group has met and discussed, others are proposing recommendations, which is the stage at which all groups should have been by the time of this meeting.

Comments on WG2 and WG3

Some members expressed their concern because WG2 (Implementation) is not showing the progress ministers would expect, especially not in answering the questions connected with the short cycle (level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning).

The Vice-chair expressed her concerns whether stakeholders are involved adequately in WG2 (Implementation) and WG3 (New Goals) activities and referred to the need for clear and definite recommendations for the ministerial conference. The chair of WG3 explained that representatives of stakeholders are members of the group. In addition, all members of both groups have been asked to announce their events and the respective results in a joint list to have an overview of involvement.

Hungary brought two BFUG documents on digitalisation to the attention of WG3.

Comments on AG2

Some members expressed their concern because they were not convinced that AG2 (Belarus roadmap) is making sufficient progress. One chair of AG2 (Germany) explained that the group is seeing "work in progress" and that the present stage can still be regarded as starting a process. Pressure for reforms could lead to formal adaptation without implementation. Therefore, getting to know the points of departure better is one aim of the group. The next meeting in January 2017 will focus on good practice and stronger dialogue of different stakeholders (including the institutional level).

Comments of AG2 members highlighted, that the shift from introducing an occupational standards framework to a generic qualifications framework is the right way to go. The next meeting with rectors from Belarus higher education institutions is a good way ahead. Still, the dialogue with teachers and students should not be

neglected. Teaching staff and students should be involved in governance. The draft Education Code under discussion has to be made available to all members of the group and to the BFUG as well.

The Belarus delegate reported that during the first year after joining the Bologna Process in 2015, a revision of the legislation led to drafting a new version of the education code. Its adoption by the parliament (which changed recently) is still pending. The Belarus delegate continued by stating that progress had been made in some aspects, e.g. ECTS, whereas others like independent quality assurance are still debatable; but it has to be stated that there is slow progress, and results are not always immediately visible. The delegate declared a willingness to take all suggestions into consideration and to provide the education code in Russian language (which has already been sent to one AG2 member).

General conclusions on AGs/WGs

The BFUG members recalled that groups are working for and under the direction of the BFUG. They have to be given clear guidance. Another Co-chairs meeting would be welcome to enhance interaction, but could not replace a discussion by the BFUG which will have to decide on all proposals. The interaction of the BFUG and its groups has to be improved, and it was proposed to define a format of reports. Even if it is probable that the BFUG will meet twice in spring 2018, these questions need to be crystallised in the BFUG meeting in Estonia. Therefore, all groups should submit reports for the fall 2017 meeting and be prepared to submit revised versions for the first meeting in 2018. The timeline for WG1 on Monitoring is different because it is based on statistical reports.

Several BFUG members expressed concern that there has to be visible progress and results from all groups as well as oral reports from all of them. The Co-chair concluded that the reports from the groups need further discussion. It was proposed that for the Malta meeting each group should define a limited number of issues for discussion which might be suitable for policy advice / input for the ministerial conference. The groups have to focus on these proposals that should be discussed at the Malta BFUG.

6. Implementation Report 2018

The chairs of WG1 (Monitoring) presented the work done in preparing the upcoming data collection for the 2018 Implementation Report, referring to the Yerevan Communiqué, the task given by the 2016 BFUG in Amsterdam, and the comments on the first proposal of the structure received from six countries. The updated draft structure of the 2018 Implementation Report was highlighted in a presentation*.

The aims are that the priorities of the Yerevan Communiqué are well addressed, that coherence with previous reports is maintained, that new sources of information enrich the report, and that new aspects are included while at the same time the length of the previous report is not exceeded. The findings should be objective and evidence-based; data collected by ESU and EUA may complement the data collected by WG1.

Proposals and comments made by BFUG members

- The new report will make a very useful document.
- There is a good balance between additional old and new indicators.
- The report should cater for a better understanding of the student composition in the short cycle.
- The gender based statistics should be further developed (very clear in graduate recruitment but not in other sections, in particular for staff).
- The section on the social dimension is very much improved.
- Recognition remains an important issue, and the report should find new ways of looking at it and extending information.
- Digital learning and digital learning environments should be included, as well as teaching in new environments.
- An aggregate index and a rating of countries on the first page should be added.
- The composition of academic staff preferably should be presented as a timeline (not a snapshot) to illustrate development over the years.
- The wording "mismatch" in figure 6.24 is problematic. What is the definition of mismatch?

Most BFUG members supported the proposal of WG1 to have a stand-alone document for non-implementation of the three key commitments. Additionally, a summary of the non-implementation report could be added in the Implementation Report.

ESU assured that the questionnaires of ESU and the one sent through the BFUG do not overlap. EUA explained that its regular TRENDS report is not done specifically for the BFUG, but that the data it will collect will be shared with WG1.

The BFUG thanked WG1 for the development of the structure for the new and very useful report which seems to be more ambitious than the previous ones. The proposed structure was adopted with the recommendations given. Scoreboard indicators will be discussed and decided upon by the BFUG after the data collection.

WG1 chairs promised to try to feed in all the comments received and explained that two questionnaires will be sent to BFUG countries to be filled in between February and Easter: a pre-filled questionnaire for established indicators, and an empty one for new indicators.

7. Cyclic procedure for dealing with non-implementation

One chair (Iceland) of AG3 (Dealing with Non-implementation) reminded the participants that before the Yerevan conference, a considerable disillusion with the level of implementation had been expressed by many which led in the Yerevan Communiqué to the assertion that “Non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA”. The chair of AG3 (Iceland) expressed the view that even if it is completely voluntary to join the Bologna Process, once a country is in it is not voluntary to implement its commitments. This Advisory Group has been established to tackle the uneven reform across countries and to come up with a proposal of measures to tackle non-implementation to present to Ministers in Paris in 2018. AG3 is only focusing on the three key commitments agreed upon by the BFUG at the meeting in March 2016 (cf. presentation*). The proposed eight-cycle procedure is based on information collected for the 2018 Implementation Report, peer-review and support for implementation. It will initially be based on a review of implementation of key commitments in all Bologna countries. It is proposed to contact the BFUG members of those countries that have difficulties, to understand if reforms were planned or introduced. Thus, a dialogue could be started. The procedure should be overseen by a body (“committee”), which should be composed in a way that prevents conflicts of interest. The maximum number of cycles before another type of intervention was needed should be proposed to the Ministers by the BFUG because the process must not become perpetual. For now, AG3 was proposing a change in mandate of AG3 to conduct the first three steps of the procedure so the model can be started effectively after the ministerial meeting in 2018.

Discussion

The BFUG welcomed the presentation of a concrete proposal and a time frame. It is important to improve reform implementation to ensure the success of EHEA but the method to reach this goal received diverse comments.

Three countries expressed their concern with the proposal. They underlined that the inclusive dimension of the Bologna Process is important and exclusion or sanctions should not be on the agenda. They felt that the cyclic procedure (except may be the first three steps) could lead to a “naming and shaming” process which will not be efficient to consolidate the EHEA when further political impetus is actually needed to re-boost the intergovernmental Bologna Process. They proposed the Advisory Group to stress inclusivity and work on positive incentives (e.g. a “Bologna label”). They were missing a clear definition of full and concrete implementation and expressed concern about a potential misuse of purely quantitative indicators. They were not against dialogue and exchange of good practice but were not in favour of now changing the mandate of AG3 and doubted the relevance of an implementation committee.

The cyclic procedure was perceived by all other intervening BFUG members, as well as most consultative members, as an enhancement process, helping countries which want to improve implementation. In their opinion, this is very much on the Bologna spirit. The Yerevan Communiqué asked for “full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level”. The process would mean starting a good dialogue and offering a lot of support. It is clearly different from the regular reporting process; the different time frame

was appreciated. With the proposed procedure it would be possible to detect and discuss the reasons for non-implementation in the countries. This is the additional and needed continuation of the results emerging from the Implementation Report. The most welcome outcome would be that the problems would not exist any longer. Implementation is a prerequisite for the consolidation of the EHEA.

AG3 therefore should consider proposing both positive and negative consequences. It was also recalled that the EHEA is a process involving governments and education systems rather than institutions, and that the idea of labels seems badly adapted to this reality. It should be taken in consideration what signal on implementation would be sent if only half of the systems in the EHEA would get an "EHEA label", what would be the result in case of negative outcome (report, sanctions or something else), and what would be the consequences of persistent non-implementation. For those within the procedure, incentives for making progress have to be developed. Some BFUG members also underlined that while reform through dialogue is the ideal outcome, there is a need for other forms of reaction in the cases where implementation cannot be furthered through dialogue. Some expressed the opinion that in these rare cases there needs to be a way to take matters further within the framework of the EHEA.

The chair of AG3 (Iceland) stressed that different types of support are proposed in the model. Individual countries might benefit more from one method than from another. The procedure is meant to be a transparency exercise. It would also be a way to pinpoint if persistent non-implementation is a consequence of countries being unable or unwilling to implement key commitments. A body ("committee") would be needed to oversee it, and a dialogue on equal footing seems the appropriate means.

The BFUG was reminded several times that it is in the end up to the ministers to decide how to deal with non-implementation, based on the type of European Higher Education Area they want. The BFUG can only prepare this discussion. It should do so by deciding on a concrete proposal for ministers.

Conclusion

The BFUG agreed to ask AG3 to improve the proposal and present an updated version for the next meeting in Malta. The proposal will take into account the comments and the questions raised, including proposal of positive and negative incentives for countries, that can also include the involvement of stakeholders at national levels. Indicators, reasons, measures and consequences have to be considered and defined properly.

The request of AG3 to change their mandate was not accepted.

8. Discussion on a permanent Bologna Secretariat

During the BFUG meeting in March 2016, the Secretariat was asked to draft a paper outlining different options for the organisation of the future Secretariat. Two main options were identified, each option offers a lot of details which have not been developed. The Secretariat underlined that the question of a Permanent Secretariat would have consequences for the governance of the EHEA beyond 2020.

If the BFUG wants to submit a proposal for an international Permanent Secretariat to the 2018 ministerial conference, a number of issues have to be clarified (cf. questions raised in the document). If no such proposal is put forward it will follow that the hosting country of the conference would go on hosting the Secretariat.

BFUG members highlighted some aspects of the two options:

The first option has worked very well due to clear goals and rotating leadership. Hosting countries become much more deeply involved. It might be worth developing criteria and a quality assurance system for the countries hosting the Secretariat and a more visible and formal process of sending staff from other countries.

The second option could mean losing flexibility. Continuity and independence could be seen as advantages, financing and its role as possible disadvantages. A Permanent Secretariat could develop professional knowledge in a longer perspective and cater for better support by professional long-term clerks. A Permanent Secretariat does not necessarily include the need to create a new international body. It might be found after

an open European wide call and be contracted for a limited duration (e.g. 5 years). Anyhow, the underlying values are maintained by the BFUG and not the Secretariat.

It has been asked if a rotating Secretariat could include some of the advantages of a Permanent Secretariat. The BFUG should concentrate on the results of AG/WG work and other political issues instead of discussing an administrative model which is not finding favour with the majority.

It was decided to go on with a rotating Secretariat and not to open the discussion again. It was suggested that for the BFUG meeting in Malta, the Co-chairs could draft a position paper to improve the current structure of the Secretariat that could be taken into consideration by the next country hosting the Secretariat.

9. Thematic discussion: Fundamental values of the EHEA

The President of the Magna Charta Observatory, Sijbolt Noorda, introduced the topics of the thematic discussion (cf. presentation): Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are needed to ask open questions; they have to be granted both for higher education institutions and within higher education institutions. Institutions have to find a compromise between these values and accountability. Academic freedom does not equal individual freedom of expression but has to be seen in the context of academia (e.g. approving to be criticised and accepting other opinions).

The topic was discussed within four parallel groups based on 5 questions suggested for debate.

10. Reports from the parallel sessions on fundamental values and discussion

The reports from the parallel session highlighted some aspects:

Having institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the legislation does not guarantee their existence in practice. Both are often taken for granted; only if one or both are lacking, institutions and individuals become aware of them. Thus, definitions are very contextual. Freedom to publish (wherever they want) is the answer for some; slow research without the need of publication for others. Some transversal aspects from all the definitions are: financial constraints limit freedom; public funding may influence decisions; if the political context is not democratic, there is limited freedom of thinking and research. Balancing economic pressure in times of crisis often leads to short term action whereas strong financial support from various sources is enhancing academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The role of institutions towards society and students needs academic freedom. Short term needs as employability and long-term goals of the society as a whole are sometimes conflicting. There is a thin line between autonomy and needs of governments. For example, there are countries where some students refuse to listen to certain professors and as a consequence, institutions have banned these teachers from campuses. Or in a country where 80% of the students want to study 4 subjects, political intervention might be needed. It is difficult to say in which cases intervention is justified. Accountability and responsibility of the academic system are very important for governments.

A balance has to be found between the demand of public authorities and needs of an institution. Universities have to find a way to decide on research priorities, and to treat excellence. An ethical code should be agreed upon in each institution. Does political correctness overweight institutional aims?

From the reports, it became clear that these values are important but difficult in an analytical matter. During the parallel sessions, there has been more talking about anecdotic experience and measurable aspects than about the values. Measuring institutional autonomy and academic freedom is very difficult. Other sources are needed than current research based on self-disclosure.

EUA has developed a method to analyse and document different types and levels of higher education autonomy (EUA Autonomy Scorecard). Magna Charta Observatory has also been monitoring countries; the good models of this monitoring could be extended on all Bologna signatory countries. Additionally, looking at alternative sources of information could be proposed to ministers, as finding good ways of reporting will be very important.

The BFUG members agreed that the values discussed during this meeting should be put in relation with other core values of higher education (e.g. integrity, human rights, quality assessment, or inclusiveness) and

with national legislative frameworks. The discussion should be continued to be able to say something in the declaration about which values are at the core of the EHEA.

11. Draft concept note for the Bologna Policy Forum 2018

Two chairs (France and Spain) of AG1 (EHEA International Co-operation) explained that the group is working on co-operation with non-EHEA partners to define the scope of the Bologna Policy Forum, that the group has built a task force to prepare the proposed concept note, and that the whole group is very involved, including external partners who are not members of the BFUG.

The presentation stated that 10 years after the first issues of “EHEA in a global setting” (and after four Bologna Policy Fora since 2009), for AG1 the Bologna Process still is one example of academic co-operation that illustrates the importance of regional integration for higher education (cf. presentation*). Other regions develop models similar to the EHEA. AG1 is already working with Latin America, Asia, Mediterranean, North Africa and Arabic countries, South-Saharan Africa. AG1 is working to prepare a sustainable process to attract non-EHEA ministers. Among the scenarios and the topics proposed in the concept note, the co-chairs of AG1 asked the BFUG to consider the general proposal to “enhance academic co-operation through inter-regional dialogue” with the possibility to launch an “international alliance” of regional higher education areas and systems in 2018, whose scope and organisation would have to be presented in Malta.

Discussion

The proposal was welcomed by the BFUG and led to a constructive discussion on the international dimension of the EHEA, the need to clarify what we are aiming at, what makes the EHEA attractive and how co-operation might be designed. The Bologna Policy Forum should become an event of political interest to attract ministers, strengthening attractiveness of the EHEA.

The BFUG members underlined that the next Bologna Policy Forum should learn from previous mistakes and provide a very strong focus. The concentration on regions is worth trying. However, the BFUG should not commit itself now to something. AG1 should present a concrete proposal on content and format at the BFUG meeting in May. When developing the programme, it should be kept in mind that EHEA Ministers will probably not be available for more than 1.5 days for the entire meeting.

The experiences of AG/WG so far concern the European dimension; the international dimension lacks somehow a clear idea of what the BFUG is aiming at. The global dimension has to be discussed also with other partners than those already mentioned from outside the EHEA e.g. from North America. Some BFUG members warned against international alliance, membership, or partnership. What would associate membership mean and is there really a demand for it? Is international alliance an attempt to bind formally other regions?

The content which is going to be discussed in the Bologna Policy Forum has to be fixed. Interests of others in the EHEA have to be clearly identified. Some BFUG members expressed their views: Approaching the topic via qualifications (not looking at formal aspects (duration, credits) but on learning outcomes) could be highly relevant. The same could apply to quality assurance. Shared fundamental values and the role of higher education institutions in furthering democracy as well as in contributing to answer global societal challenges could be another motivation for co-operation. Student participation and involvement of higher education staff could be interesting, in particular for US institutions.

Conclusion

The BFUG asked AG1 to continue their work and to present the issue in Malta. The BFUG then will discuss options for the 2018 Bologna Policy Forum and potential meetings with partner regions in between Bologna Policy Fora. Special attention will be paid to reach the chosen goals of attracting high-level participation, and proposing interesting contents.

12. Discussion of the application procedure and schedule for the 2020 conference

It was proposed to postpone the deadline in order to facilitate thorough preparation of proposals in the beginning of the year. The call has been opened with the date for submission set for 28 February 2017. A recommendation will be issued at the Malta BFUG meeting in May 2017, and the final decision on the country hosting the 2020 meeting and the Secretariat will be taken by the ministers in Paris at the 2018 conference.

13. Report on the Lisbon Recognition Convention

The main results of the report were presented (cf. presentation*). The Lisbon Recognition Convention has the second highest number of ratifications of conventions in the COE. The BFUG took note of the report and thanked Sjur Bergan for the presentation of this important topic. Members have been invited to send comments to Sjur Bergan and the Secretariat.

14. Information by the BFUG Secretariat

14.1. New website

The Secretariat informed the BFUG members that the webmaster at the Secretariat, Juliette Roussel has worked on the new website for one year with the technical assistance of the Romanian colleagues. The user-friendly and easily accessible site was launched in September 2016. Statistics on the visits can be found on page 2 of the document provided. Members are invited to update their country/organisation webpage, to be present on social media using EHEA / BFUG hashtag and to promote the EHEA website with a link on their country webpage.

The BFUG expressed its warmest thanks for the excellent quality of the website.

14.2. Proposal for a BFUG Digital Communications Team

Following a request at the Board meeting in Chisinau 2016, the Secretariat proposed to set up a voluntary digital team. The people involved could focus on content, design or catering for new technologies. The team proposed would not replace the Secretariat or parts of it.

Some BFUG members were not in favour of combining basic knowledge of the Bologna Process with digital competences. Additional technical support could be good, but political expertise is critical. The stability of group composition was doubted. Marketing the EHEA message needs a lot of attention now the website is attractive, but it is not necessary to set up a new team. Being on other media like Twitter and LinkedIn would be important. A communication officer within the Secretariat is necessary but does not need to cater for content. This person could propose a strategy on how the BFUG members should contribute, and they will provide content.

In conclusion, the proposal of a Digital Communications Team was not supported. In line with the paper on the next Secretariat that the incoming Co-chairs could prepare for the next BFUG meeting in Malta, the creation of a Communications Officer position could be included. The BFUG will continue to consider how to enhance communication. Applicants for 2020 will be invited to provide their views on this topic.

14.3. First information on the 2018 Ministerial Conference

The Secretariat reported that an events manager has been recruited, and an internal committee (with the Director General for higher education, the Vice-chair, a representative of the Division for European and international affairs in research, innovation and higher education, a representative of the financial department, and representatives of the communication department) has been set up by the Secretariat. There will be a public call for the venue(s), so the BFUG will be informed about the venue chosen during the BFUG meeting in autumn 2017.

15. Questions and answers regarding the reports from consultative members

The BFUG took note of the information provided with the reports.

16. Information by the incoming Co-chairs

Norway and Malta gave their country presentations, focusing amongst other things on national higher education systems, demographic data, current priorities, and they highlighted political ambitions related to the Bologna process (cf. presentations).

The BFUG Board meeting will take place on 30 March in Oslo, Norway, followed by a first meeting of the communiqué drafting committee on the 31 March.

The BFUG meeting will take place on 24/25 May on the island of Gozo, Malta.

17. AOB

EAIE has expressed its wish to become a consultative member.

A majority of the delegations that took the floor opposed any enlargement of the number of consultative members, others stressed that opening up for this organisation would widen the scope in a way that would have consequences.

Since EAIE is not a membership organisation representing stakeholders in higher education, the BFUG should decide not to include EAIE as a consultative member. All stakeholders are represented adequately by the current consultative members. In conclusion, the Co-chairs and the Vice-chair will check EAIE against the criteria of Annex 4 of the proceedings. If the institution is ineligible, the letter will be responded accordingly. If it is eligible, further information will be provided for the next BFUG meeting in Malta.

The Secretariat was asked not to put such requests under AOB in the future and to provide additional information with such an application.

Austria announced a peer learning activity on the strategy for the social dimension on March 22 in Linz.

On 12-13 June in Sweden a conference on refugees / measures for recognition of prior learning will take place.

The BFUG thanked the representative of the European Commission, Adam Tyson, for his substantial contribution to its work and the development of the EHEA during the past six years.

* All presentations are available on the website of the meeting <http://www.ehea.info/cid105476/bfug-meeting-52.html>