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RENEWED APPROACH TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY COMMITMENTS WITHIN THE EHEA

Proposal to be discussed at the joint WG2/AG3 meeting, December 7th

A. Preliminary note / BFUG decision in Tartu

On the basis of

- discussions made in Tartu (November 9th 2017) about reports from AG3 and WG2,
- and the oral presentation by WG 1 (Monitoring) in Tartu, underlining that, from the data collection to be further analysed and commented upon in the upcoming Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR)/ 2018 report, there was little progress between 2015 and 2018 with regard to the implementation of the key commitments,

the following BFUG decision was made:

AG3 and WG2 are asked to make a joint proposal for the implementation of the 3 agreed-on key commitments, enhancing the notion of reversed peer groups as recommended by WG2.

- This new proposal to be made will be discussed in the next AG3 meeting planned in Brussels, next December 7th, and enlarged to WG2 chairs.

B. Context and reminders

a/ Quotations

* Excerpts from the Yerevan Communiqué:

'Thanks to the Bologna reforms, progress has been made in enabling students and graduates to move within the EHEA with recognition of their qualifications and periods of study,

Nonetheless, implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic and superficial ways.

Implementing agreed structural reforms is a prerequisite for the consolidation of the EHEA and, in the long run, for its success. A common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance standards and guidelines, cooperation for mobility and joint programmes and degrees are the foundations of the EHEA. We will develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning. Full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level requires shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and academic communities and stronger involvement of stakeholders. Non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA. We need more precise measurement of performance as a basis for reporting from member countries. Through policy dialogue and exchange of good practice, we will provide targeted support to member countries experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals and enable those who wish to go further to do so.'

* Excerpts from the report of WG 2 (implementation):

'We strongly suggest that all countries engage in an active dialogue across the EHEA and in particular with the countries (including the stakeholders) that have not yet implemented fully the structural reforms that are crucial for the consolidation of the EHEA; We recommend to further develop the concept of 'reversed peer review' as an instrument and tool to provide support to the members experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals. These reviews should include a follow-up and monitoring exercise to look at whether the activity was useful and whether the conclusions have been implemented. We would like to advise to establish thematic (related to one structural reform) peer groups including representatives (ministries, HEIs, practitioners and students) of countries that have sufficiently

implemented the agreed structural reform and countries that have not yet reached a sufficient level of implementation.'

b/ Rationale - Analysis

The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental voluntary convergence-based process which independent States, party to the European Cultural Convention, freely joined in order to make a genuine EHEA : while diversity is rich of all our European cultures and traditions, higher education reforms each State is implementing are making our diverse HE systems more compatible on the basis of shared values, principles and tools, and allow further student mobility with smooth recognition of qualifications and study periods.

In order to realize the full potential of the EHEA we have to further step up reforms as mentioned in the Yerevan Communiqué and in particular to speed up and complete the implementation of the key commitments across the EHEA.

Therefore it is needed to develop a new approach to foster and to speed up the implementation of the 3 agreed-on key commitments. This approach should follow the Bologna philosophy and its positive spirit of mutual cooperation and capacity building in order to move further all together, and should aim at strengthening a process of policy dialogue and reversed peer review, peer support and peer counselling among the EHEA members.

As it is strongly stated in the Yerevan Communiqué, the new approach should be inspired by the idea that full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level requires shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and the academic community and stronger involvement of stakeholders.

Only by substantially implementing the key commitments, a country and its higher education institutions, students and teachers can fully benefit from being a member of the EHEA through enhanced cooperation, enhanced mobility and exchange of students, teachers and researchers, through cross border partnerships, through joint study programmes and joint research projects, ...with the following results: - enhancing the quality of education and research for all students and staff, -making a meaningful contribution to society (local, regional, national and European), -allowing the EHEA to further develop its credibility and attractiveness.

C. Proposal

Therefore, below we have developed an approach that covers the period 2018-2020.

When by the end of that period a country demonstrates no commitment nor its engagement to enter in a process of dialogue and to commit itself to speed up the implementation of the key commitments, then it is the responsibility of the ministerial conference to take the necessary measures.

1/ Reversed peer groups

a/ Focus: By the end of 2018, at least three (3) reversed peer groups dedicated to the three key commitments or to a key facet of the structural reform concerned, have been established:

- A peer group dealing with quality assurance
- A peer group dealing with qualifications frameworks including ECTS and DS
- A peer group dealing with the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Depending on the demand it could be possible to have more than one peer group for each of these topics.

For each of the three key commitments a background document will be prepared (see section 4 below) by the chairs of WG 1, WG 2 and AG 3 making reference to information from the Bologna Process Implementation Report, addressing the level of implementation of agreed key commitments and the scorecard indicators, and if relevant, to any additional evidence-based information showing difficult challenges to be addressed.

b/ Composition:

The reverse peer groups will include countries (2 to 3) that have sufficiently implemented the key commitment concerned and countries (2 to 3) that are coping with specific challenges to be addressed for full implementation.

The countries will be represented by representatives of ministries, and must also involve a stakeholders' representative: either HEIs, students and other agencies or any other additional stakeholders where relevant, especially for countries which haven't fully implemented the 3 KCs yet.

Each reversed peer group will be coordinated by a set of two (2) co-chairs, meaning one of each of the two types of countries (relative to implementation challenges). The co-chair countries will be supported by the BFUG secretariat for organizing exchanges, meetings and any site visit, while financial support will be granted by the European Commission on the basis of an adhoc call.

2/ Coordination Group

The co-chairs as reversed peer group coordinators are responsible for the overarching coordination of the work of the peer groups and for reporting back to the BFUG, as the body responsible for the overall follow up.

The co-chairs as reversed peer group coordinators will be gathering on a regularly basis (2-3x/year) in order to share experiences and ensure coordination of their approaches and progress; to do so any stakeholder concerned (such as EQAR or monitoring/reporting WG or i.e. a representative of Lisbon recognition convention committee ...).

3/ Actions and working method

Along the lines mentioned above, several clusters of peer groups on each key commitment may be set up.

All countries are involved and each reversed peer review group offers a platform for mutual exchanges on an equal footing:

- a platform for sharing knowledge, ideas and practices;
- a platform for dialogue and mutual learning and understanding with regard to the implementation process: the context, the policy/policies adopted and the measures translating the key commitments at the national level; it is also a platform for discussing the factors that are affecting positively and negatively the implementation.

The peer groups should also agree on further actions aiming at speeding up the implementation, in particular:

- peer support / peer counselling: expert support, exchange of experts,
- targeted seminars including in particular the national public authorities and the broader academic community to build a shared ownership and commitment;
- drafting legislative documents.

The countries that have implementation practices about one key commitment under focus are ready to deliver peer to peer support to other countries in their efforts to further and better implement the key commitment-related reforms and are ready to invite the peers to review their adopted policy and the policy enactment through practices.

The countries that have not yet fully implemented the key commitments are ready to discuss the actions that they will undertake in order to step up and fulfil the implementation process and are ready to review the way the peers have implemented a key commitment-related reform and its impact.

Between November/December 2018 and March 2020, each reversed peer group will meet 2/3 times, while regular updates must be provided to peer groups Co-Chairs' meetings (the coordination group) and to the BFUG.

Eventually, the coordinators of each reversed peer group have to take initiatives to conduct an evaluation of the usefulness of the peer-review which was carried out, and to provide a feedback to the BFUG on the follow-up of the agreed actions.

An overall assessment of the outcomes of the reversed peer reviews will be included in the 2020 Bologna Process Implementation Report.

In the considered 2018-2020 timeframe, the implementation efforts on the reversed peer review approach will substitute for any other procedure (foreseen or additional).

4/ Practicalities and roadmap between December 2017 and December 2018

- The new approach will be discussed by the joint AG 3/WG2 meeting of 7 December 2017;
- December 2018: The output of the discussion of this joint meeting should be circulated among the two groups members
- **BFUG Board meeting of 24 January 2018**: presentation of the proposed new approach draft
- **BFUG meeting of 5-6 February 2018**: presentation of the proposed new approach draft and of the draft call to EHEA member countries
- **BFUG meeting of 24-25 April 2018**: final approval of the new approach and the draft call to EHEA members to show interest to participate in one or more of the intended peer groups and to act as a coordinator of one of those groups;
- **The BFUG of 24-25 April 2018** agrees on the draft Terms of Reference tasking chairs (WG1, WG2 & AG3) to have the responsibility of the whole process of reversed peer reviews
- May 24th-25th 2018: EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris: Ministers agree on the new approach proposal
- **June/September 2018**: the new agreed-on approach is formalised and the call is sent out
- **The BFUG of 28 September 2018**: Update on the set up of the reversed peer groups.
- November 2018: the peer groups are set up by the Bologna Secretariat on the basis of interested willing countries
- November/December 2018:
 - first meetings of the peer groups.
 - a report of the outcomes of the call is sent to the BFUG. If there is an insufficient response to the call, the BFUG will have then to discuss on how to proceed further.