



Ministry of Education and
Science of Georgia

BFUG Meeting LXXXVI

16-17 November 2023
Madrid, Spain

Minutes of Meeting

List of participants

Delegation/Working structures	First Name	Last Name
Albania (BFUG Vice-Chair)	Linda	Pustina
Andorra/ WG on San Marino Roadmap Co-Chair	Jordi	Llombart
Andorra	Maria Del Mar	Martínez
Armenia	Tatevik	Gharibyan
Armenia	Elina	Asriyan
Austria/ BICG Co-Chair	Helga	Posset
Austria	Stephan	De Pasqualin
Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova
Belgium Flemish Community/CG on GPD Co-Chair (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	Liesbeth	Hens
Belgium Flemish Community	Rana	Mizrak
Belgium French Community (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	Caroline	Hollela
Belgium French Community (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	Justyna	Nerkowska
Bosnia and Hercegovina (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair)	Aida	Duric
Council of Europe	Catherine	Dolgova-Dreyer
Croatia	Dijana	Mandić
Croatia	Vlatka	Blažević
Croatia/WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
Czech Republic/TF on RR Co-Chair	Michal	Karpíšek
Czech Republic	Tereza	Vengřinová
Denmark	Jonas Husum	Johannesen
Education International (EI/ETUCE)	Andreas	Keller
ENQA	Anna	Gover
ENQA	Péter	Levente Lakatos
ESU/ WG on Social Dimension Co-Chair	Horia-Șerban	Onita
ESU	Iris	Kimizoglu
ESU	Tanguy	Guibert
EUA	Maria	Kelo
EUA	Michael	Gaebel
EURASHE/WG on Learning and Teaching Co-Chair	Jon	Altuna
EURASHE	Jakub	Grodecki
EQAR	Stéphane	Lauwick
EQAR	Magalie	Soenen
Estonia	Janne	Pukk
European Commission	Vanessa	Debiais-Sainton
European Commission	Kinga	Szuly
EURYDICE/ WG on Monitoring Co-Chair	David	Crosier
Eurodoc	Aleksandra	Lewandowska
EUROSTUDENT	Martin	Unger
Finland/ WG on San Marino Roadmap Co-Chair	Maija	Innola
Finland	Jonna	Korhonen
France	Manuel	Bouard
France	Mathieu	Musquin
Georgia (BFUG Co-Chair)	Maia	Shukhoshvili
Germany Länder	Maritt	Metternich

Germany	Achim	Weber
Greece	Alexandra	Karvouni
Holy See (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)/Drafting Committee Co-Chair	Melanie	Rosenbaum
Holy See	S.E. Mons. Paul	Tighe
Hungary	András	Báló
Hungary	Zsolt	Dános
Iceland	Una Strand	Viðarsdóttir
Ireland	Adam	Bluett
Italy/ TF on RR Co-Chair	Luca	Lantero
Italy/CG on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
Italy	Chiara	Finocchietti
Liechtenstein	Eva	Meirer
Luxembourg	Patricia	Marx
Moldova	Nadejda	Velisco
Montenegro	Milica	Kavedžić
Norway/WG on Monitoring Co-Chair	Tone Flood	Strøm
Norway	Ingrid	Skrede
The Netherlands	Sophie	Duijser
The Netherlands	Marianne	van Exel
Poland	Andrzej	Stolarczyk
Portugal	Maria Carla	Proença
Romania/TF on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing Co-Chair	Daniela Cristina	Ghițulică
Romania/WG on Fundamental Values Co-Chair	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
San Marino	Remo	Massari
Slovak Republic	Peter	Ondreicka
Slovenia	Jemej	Širok
Spain (BFUG Co-Chair)	Margarita	de Lezcano-Mújica
Spain	Ernesto	Anabitarte
Spain	Ignacio	Blanco
Spain	Rafael	Ivorra
Sweden (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair)	Robin	Moberg
Switzerland	Aurélia	Robert-Tissot
Turkey	Aydın	Aslan
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Edlira	Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
BFUG Secretariat	Aida	Myrto

Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, UK Scotland sent regrets. Latvia, Serbia, UNESCO did not attend the meeting.

Welcome Address by the Secretary General, Ministry of Universities

The Secretary General of the Ministry of Universities extended a warm welcome to all participants and conveyed appreciation to the outgoing BFUG Co-Chairs for their valuable support. He provided an overview of recent developments in Spain's university system, highlighting the introduction of a new framework law that addresses key topics discussed within the BFUG, including academic career promotion, enhanced student governance participation, internationalization, and a heightened emphasis on the social dimension of higher education. Additionally, he shared that Spain has implemented new regulations pertaining to university recognition, quality assurance, doctoral education, and the work-life balance of professors. He emphasized Spain's dedication to continuing these efforts in harmony with Bologna principles. Concluding his remarks, he expressed best wishes for a successful and productive meeting, with a specific focus on preparations for the Ministerial Conference in Tirana, which commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Bologna process.

1. Welcome and Introduction

1.1. Welcome by the BFUG Co-Chairs (Spain and Georgia)

Margarita De Lezcano-Mujica Nuñez (BFUG Co-Chair, Spain) extended warm greetings to all participants and acknowledged the contributions of the BFUG Chairs and the Secretariat in supporting the organization of the meeting. She concluded by wishing for a fruitful and productive discussion.

Maia Shukhoshvili (BFUG Co-Chair, Georgia) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and expressed her gratitude to the BFUG Chairs and Secretariat for their support. She recounted the Board meeting in Tbilisi, emphasizing the numerous discussions held during the working structure updates session. She concluded by expressing her hope that any pending issues would be finalized and wished for a productive meeting.

1.2. Welcome by the BFUG Vice-Chair (Albania)

Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice-Chair) extended warm greetings to the participants, and expressed gratitude to the Spanish Ministry for organizing the meeting. She expressed her wish for the meeting to focus on essential issues and key messages the BFUG intends to convey through the Tirana Communiqué. She provided a brief update, mentioning ongoing work on the Ministerial Conference, with more details on the venue and date expected next week. The official communication regarding the date and venue would be sent through the Secretariat. In her closing remarks, she extended her wishes for a fruitful meeting for all.

The European Commission conveyed significant apprehensions regarding the prolonged delay in confirming a specific date and venue for the Ministerial Conference. They inquired about the option of initiating work on an alternative solution. In response, the Vice Chair committed to conveying this concern to the Minister of Education and providing a corresponding update.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 2.1 Draft Agenda](#)

[BFUG ES GA 86 2.2 Draft Annotated Agenda](#)

3. **Information by the outgoing BFUG Co-Chairs (Sweden and Bosnia & Herzegovina)**

3.1. BFUG Board Meeting hosted by Bosnia & Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 31 March 2023

Aida Duric (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair, Bosnia & Herzegovina) provided an overview of the positive collaboration and the Board meeting held in Sarajevo in March 2023. She concluded by expressing thanks to all colleagues for their collaborative efforts during this period and extended best wishes for success to the BFUG Co-Chairs.

3.2. BFUG Meeting hosted by Sweden, Stockholm, 11-12 May 2023

Robin Moberg (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair, Sweden) extended warm greetings to all participants and commended the strong collaboration and achievements of the previous BFUG meeting held in Stockholm and committed to his continued involvement as a member in the BFUG Working structures. Concluding his remarks, he expressed his hope for a productive meeting.

5. **Update from the BFUG Secretariat, including update on the call for the host of the 2027 EHEA Ministerial Conference and BFUG Secretariat**

Edlira Subashi (Head of BFUG Secretariat) provided updates since the previous BFUG meeting. Key points included amendments to the bylaws related to the Secretariat aimed at streamlining collaboration processes with the Ministry, as well as an overview of the Secretariat's coordination efforts. Website enhancements, including an accessible meeting materials archive, were highlighted. Additionally, she mentioned the preparation of a newsletter and the production of an analytical Communiqué review to support the Drafting Committee's work. It was emphasized that the Secretariat actively participated in multiple working structures' meetings, produced meeting minutes and supplementary reports, during a working period that saw an unprecedented number of Working Structures and meetings that exceeded the initial plans. Updates on the call for hosting the Secretariat and Ministerial Conference were provided, noting the lack of expressions of interest or candidacy at the present time. Information on past Ministerial Conferences, including working period duration and the number of working structures, was shared. The Head concluded by expressing gratitude for the support of the BFUG Chairs and Working Structures and extended wishes for a productive meeting.

The Council of Europe (CoE) expressed appreciation to the work of the Secretariat and the initiatives undertaken, and expressed that for the future working period, the workplan ought to be more compact, in order to streamline activities more effectively.

The European Students Union (ESU) expressed appreciation for the work accomplished and highlighted the establishment of new structures, such as subgroups within BFUG working structures, which were integrated into Umbrella projects. He called for a discussion on the anticipated level of support from the BFUG Secretariat for subgroups/working groups linked to projects. The representative acknowledged the progress made in terms of the Secretariat's outreach efforts on social media and newsletters but requested more clarity on the purpose of the accounts, their interaction, and the BFUG's contribution.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 5 1 BFUG Secretariat Presentation](#) and [BFUG ES GA 86 5 2 EHEA Website Report](#)

6. **Updates from the Working Groups and Task Forces**

6.1. Update from the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)

Helga Posset (BICG Co-Chair) reported on seven online meetings and plans for an in-person meeting in January 2024. She highlighted the effective operation of Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs), emphasizing their cooperation on various topics, including a joint document on micro-credentials. Discussion points included encouraging active participation in TPG activities, coordinating representatives across TPGs, and balancing innovative themes with Key

Commitments. Acknowledging a persistent gap in implementing key commitments within the EHEA, the BICG proposed that countries develop concrete, publicly shareable implementation plans after each Ministerial Communiqué. The importance of consistent implementation for the EHEA's success was emphasized. The Co-Chair concluded by posing the question, "Do countries want to close the implementation gap?"

Italy expressed the need for data supporting the BICG's perception of the quality of work by various TPGs and suggested considering quality elements collected by EU-funded programs. They emphasized the impact of TPGs' Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) on cultural shifts and urged the BICG to request and evaluate these project quality elements. Italy also noted the absence of mention in the draft Communiqué about continuing BICG and the TPGs, proposing the inclusion of fundamental values as a potential pillar for both sets of activities. The BICG Co-Chair recognized the successful collaboration of the TPGs with Erasmus+ projects and PLAs. However, they highlighted slow progress in key commitments. The Co-Chair informed that the upcoming BICG meeting will focus on the recommendation for the continuation of the peer support approach and of their work, including the potential integration of fundamental values in coordination efforts.

The European University Association (EUA) pointed out that the emphasis on innovative topics might be diverting attention from the implementation of key commitments. Regarding engagement with projects, they recommended initiating a discussion in upcoming BFUG meetings around streamlining processes, defining roles by distinguishing elements within the BFUG Work Plan from specific project activities, and ensuring a controlled approach to prevent an unlimited proliferation of groups and sub-groups.

The Holy See highlighted challenges in communication due to the increased number of structures within TPGs, noting attempts to streamline communication by consistently sending the same BFUG delegate to minimize disruptions and noted that the prevalence of online sessions, while convenient during the pandemic, has not always been as well-prepared as in-person meetings.

Finland suggested the utility of thematic grouping and the identification of specific areas for each country to work on, emphasizing the value of such an approach. This approach was welcomed and it was proposed exploring ways to efficiently manage workloads to ensure that implementation goals can be met effectively.

EQAR emphasized the importance of addressing innovative topics within TPGs, considering the varying levels of development among participating countries. She highlighted existing mechanisms for targeted discussions and staff mobility to meet specific country needs. She pointed out that subgroups within TPGs are voluntary, allowing countries to choose based on their interests and priorities. Finally, she underscored the need for active engagement of ministries in TPGs, such as TPG C, emphasizing that the involvement of ministries, not just quality assurance agencies, is crucial for effective discussions on a policy level.

ESU emphasized the need for improved stakeholder involvement at the national level, and highlighted the challenge that many national stakeholders are unaware of country plans and their monitoring. ESU raised questions about the nature and adoption of documents within TPGs, seeking clarity on their status and ministerial endorsement. They stressed the importance of ensuring concrete follow-up at the national level and supported the publishable implementation plan as a practical way forward.

Azerbaijan proposed the inclusion of the TPGs' recommendations in the Communiqué. They highlighted the dynamic nature of the labour market, emphasizing the need to revisit and update outdated approaches, particularly in areas such as digitalization, recognition, micro-credentials, and short cycles of higher education.

The European Commission (EC) suggested analyzing the effectiveness of the current approach and exploring the possibility of adapting and enhancing the BICG in the future. They proposed inviting Co-Chairs of TPGs to provide a handover with good practices for the next Co-Chairs. Emphasizing the importance of balancing key commitments and innovative issues, the EC clarified that they had not been pushing for the latter but welcomed discussions. They stressed that the primary focus should be on advancing the implementation of key commitments. To facilitate self-assessment by countries, the EC proposed creating a checklist or roadmap of good practices, drawing on the Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR). This approach aims to identify areas where countries may need assistance and foster better collaboration within the group to drive progress in key commitment implementation.

Belgium French Community raised a query about the expected outputs of the TPG B working group on the European degree. The TPG B Co-Chair clarified that not all sub-working groups fall under the TPG directly, as some are part of the project. Specifically, the work on the European degree was conducted within the project team, to address issues related to the recognition of potential developments around the European degree and, more broadly, the recognition of transnational degrees. It was added that all sub-working groups, even those within the project, report their results and engage in discussions within the TPG B.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 1 BICG Update](#)

6.2. Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process

Tone Flood Strom (WG on Monitoring, Co-Chair) provided an update on the group's recent activities, emphasizing collaboration with other WGs, such as the social dimension, fundamental values, and learning and teaching. The latest meeting focused on discussing draft chapters of the BPIR. David Crosier (WG on Monitoring, Co-Chair) reported on challenges faced in regards to the questionnaire, also noting that the extensive range of questions posed a challenge for countries, resulting in missed deadlines. Despite setting a May deadline, only 40% of country responses were received by the end of May, with the last submission coming in September, and Serbia did not contribute. Additionally, challenges arose in obtaining sufficient evidence for answers, leading to ongoing clarification and

supplementary questions. Looking ahead, they suggested exploring thematically focused reports, possibly on specific topics like the social dimension or fundamental values, to streamline efforts. A discussion on the future monitoring approach was proposed, considering the impracticality of comprehensive questionnaires within the given timeframe. The Co-Chairs thanked country members, as well as ESU and EUROSTUDENT for their collaboration.

The members congratulated the WG for their work. Italy raised concerns about the second cycle degree indicator, highlighting its ambiguity concerning medical programs. They emphasized that the majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive medical programs as long cycles, creating a contradiction with the indicator. Italy also mentioned an increase in medical programs, approved after a request from students, but now faces repercussions for exceeding the 10% threshold, and questioned the rationale behind using 10% rather than 15%. The second point related to recognition, where Italy sought clarification on classifying the ENIC NARIC toolkit as an official Bologna tool for refugees. This was seconded by CoE, who also sought clarification on European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) used as an official Bologna tool for refugees.

Belgium French Community suggested focusing on the EHEA's vision of the three "Is" (innovative, interconnected, inclusive) for future work. It was also mentioned the absence of charts depicting the evolution of countries' level of implementation over time in the current report, expressing interest in its return. Regarding the annexes, it was proposed excluding the definition of the social dimension.

Denmark raised concerns about the imbalance in using scorecard indicators, noting the absence of such indicators under learning and teaching, signaling a potential area of lesser importance.

ENQA emphasized the necessity of including references in the narrative text, specifically addressing agencies demonstrating compliance with ESG through ENQA membership rather than EQAR registration. They expressed the need for clarity on the threshold for the yellow category, as it mentions HEIs being reviewed by an EQAR registered agency without specifying the criteria for "some." Additionally, ENQA identified instances in the text, where there was a need to clarify that there is no mechanism for reviewing a country or region's QA system against the ESG, as the mechanisms are designed for agencies or institutions.

EC acknowledged that for next periods, rather than having a huge comprehensive report, it would be more effective to have more regular reports, each time focusing on different chapters so that it would allow for the countries to have a more effective data collection, and for Eurydice to go more in depth in the analysis.

ESU looked forward to presenting a student's perspective on de facto indicators in the Bologna Process. Responding to Italy's concerns about medical students, ESU suggested exploring criteria related to programs without specific alternative regulations and considering a relative comparison by the number of programs. On quality assurance, ESU appreciated the scorecard indicator as it is, recalling previous comments in Stockholm on EQAR registration being the modality endorsed by ministers for ESG compliance, but proposed clarifying in the narrative ENQA's perspective, without altering the indicators. For future monitoring, ESU recommended a more focused approach, emphasizing the three Is vision and addressing de facto elements, especially in the social dimension.

Iceland highlighted challenges in the social dimension chapter due to a lack of baseline information, suggesting indicators and scorecards be more meaningful with a clear understanding of each country's challenges. Finland and Sweden supported this, emphasizing a review of certain indicators to ensure alignment with actual issues and concerns about challenges in responding to interference cases despite having relevant policies.

EI-ETUCE expressed concerns about the proposal to concentrate future reports on specific topics, emphasizing that many countries are still working on key commitments. They suggested recommending the inclusion of core themes in the report while ensuring comprehensive coverage of all topics. The goal is to keep members informed regularly about progress and areas needing attention, given the intervals between Ministerial Conferences.

Holy See highlighted the absence of a light green category in quality assurance, advocating for its reinstatement from a systematic perspective. They expressed opposition to the exclusive focus on EQAR registration for assessing ESG compliance, emphasizing the need for alignment in this context. The Holy See requested a reconsideration of this decision and sought an explanation for the removal of the light green category, which remains unchanged in other areas.

EQAR expressed support for ENQA's suggestion regarding the consideration of ENQA membership explained in the narrative, and concluded by affirming its commitment to consider perspectives from all involved parties.

David Crosier expressed gratitude for the feedback received and clarified that the choice of indicators was influenced by the data available. He acknowledged the possibility of reconsidering indicators based on the comments received. Regarding the refugee toolkit, he clarified that the data was based on countries' self-reporting, and it was included not as a scorecard indicator but to enhance the report's completeness. He suggested the option to exclude the toolkit information if desired. Regarding the learning and teaching chapter, he highlighted that the decision not to include scorecard indicators was in line with the advice from the WG on Learning and Teaching. Moreover, the BFUG's majority view in Stockholm influenced the exclusion of the light green category, but he expressed openness to reinstating it based on the BFUG's current position. He clarified the rationale behind biases in the social dimension chapter, emphasizing the importance of following principles and guidelines. He addressed concerns about contextual information, stating that relevant information was included in Chapter One on key data. Tone Flood Strom remarked that, in areas such as the social dimension, there may be a need to reconsider indicators and evaluate whether aligning with principles and guidelines should be maintained or if clarification through an alternative approach is warranted. The Co-Chairs concluded by acknowledging that numerous aspects raised are relevant to the future monitoring process, and emphasized the necessity of making decisions regarding the balance between depth and comprehensiveness. They conveyed that the WG would review the feedback and formulate proposals for the future.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 7 WG Monitoring BPIR Chapter 1 EHEA Key Data](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 1 WG Monitoring BPIR Chapter 2 Key Commitments](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 8 WG Monitoring BPIR Chapter 3 Fundamental Values](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 2 WG Monitoring BPIR Chapter 4 Social Dimension](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 3 WG Monitoring BPIR Chapter 5 Learning and Teaching](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 9 WG Monitoring BPIR Chapter 6 Mobility and Internationalisation](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 4 WG Monitoring BPIR Annex BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 5 WG Monitoring BPIR References](#)
[BFUG ES GA 86 6 2 6 WG Monitoring BPIR Glossary](#)

6.3. Working Group on Fundamental Values

Mihai Cezar Haj (WG on FV, Co-Chair) provided updates on the group's progress and highlighted that the statements, available on the EHEA website, incorporate the feedback received by the BFUG. The draft framework to further the monitoring and implementation of fundamental values, presented and debated in the Bucharest meeting in November, relies on expert work within the Erasmus+ NEWFAV project. The next WG meeting aims to finalize the proposed framework for the current mandate, with plans for piloting in four countries between January and April 2024. Previous work on the framework involved mapping existing indicators, assessing relevance and limitations, and consulting researchers and stakeholders. Recommendations for the next period include continuing WG on FV activities, continuously developing the monitoring framework, engaging with similar initiatives, and supporting the enhancement of EHEA fundamental values. The statements and framework are expected to be annexes to the Ministerial Communiqué and the WG report, respectively.

Austria expressed strong support for a continued focus on fundamental values within the Tirana Communiqué, emphasizing the significance of establishing a national approach within each country's systems. Germany supported the group's work and sought information on the next steps for creating the monitoring framework. The EC appreciated the crucial work conducted, assuring collaboration with the NEWFAV project and proposing the organization of a coalition during the next WG meeting to enhance complementarity among various initiatives.

The EUA stressed the need to clarify how the documents and statements would function in the future, especially concerning the encouragement for self-reflection and peer learning, suggesting a clearer approach on the expected utilization and follow-up.

The CoE expressed interest in monitoring, with plans for an implementation review report on their recommendation about public authorities' responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy. They are actively involved in efforts that are anticipated to offer valuable insights to the WG's work, including setting up an observatory to counter education fraud, through the Platform on Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity in Education, aiming to uphold fundamental values in society.

The Belgium Flemish Community sought clarification on the countries selected for framework implementation and questioned why the structure should continue as a WG instead of a TPG in the next working period. The Holy See recommended clarification of sub-structures within the BFUG and openness in discussing fundamental values in various contexts. EI ETUCE emphasized the need for clarity on interactions between different values, providing examples related to institutional autonomy and suggesting references to these connections in the statements.

The WG on FV Co-Chair mentioned that by the end of January, the WG plans to have another discussion on the framework, with piloting starting immediately and expected to be finalized around May. The NEWFAV project's timeline influenced the piloting schedule, but they hope for minimal revisions by the end of the piloting phase. Coordination between different initiatives is a priority, and in the next WG meeting, representatives from various frameworks will be brought together to ensure a common understanding of fundamental values. Regarding the working structure format, the WG recommends to continue peer learning on fundamental values as a Working Group until 2027, after which it may transition to another structure. Discussions on how monitoring should be conducted are ongoing, with options and a technical framework to be presented to the BFUG for adoption.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 3 1 WG FV Report](#) and [BFUG ES GA 86 6 3 2 WG FV Introduction and Statements](#)

6.4. Working Group on Social Dimension

Ninoslav S. Schmidt and Horia Onita (Co-Chairs, WG on SD) gave an overview of the WG on SD's progress on the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) for the social dimension in the EHEA. Ninoslav S. Schmidt mentioned that substantial work had been undertaken on refining the indicators and explanatory descriptors, in close coordination with Eurydice. The Co-Chair emphasized that the descriptors serve to offer policy context rather than gauge indicator implementation. These indicators, in collaboration with the Eurydice and validated through piloting and surveys, provide a flexible and comprehensive framework for monitoring social dimension policies at both European and national levels. The report highlights the need for continued efforts to address social dimension challenges in HE, as evidenced by the ongoing global survey on equity and the urgency to support countries in strengthening their social dimension policies. Horia Onita presented the extensive consultation process for the PAGs involving multiple stages, including presentations at BFUG and Board meetings, feedback collection, and iterative improvements. Specific sessions were held on quality assurance and social dimension of students and staff, leading to a well-collaborated effort. An online consultation meeting with the BFUG in 6 September further gathered input, with representatives supporting the document's content. Modalities of adoption were discussed, favouring inclusion as an annex to the Tirana Communiqué. Overall, 11 cycles of consultations and 19 iterations were conducted. Therefore, the Co-Chairs

introduced the document for a conclusive discussion during this BFUG meeting, aiming to explore potential adoption avenues by ministers.

Several countries, including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and The Netherlands, expressed concerns about the social dimension aspect in the BPIR. They highlighted challenges in the PAGs, particularly in Nordic systems, and suggested revisiting the wording for a more flexible approach. Iceland clarified that certain countries face constraints in adopting specific measures due to legislation preventing the targeting of particular groups in policy development, and emphasized the need for a holistic policy approach, supporting Finland's proposal of presenting the document as a toolbox.

Croatia acknowledged the document's thoroughness and efficacy, underscoring its descriptive nature. They emphasized that the document should not be viewed as a challenge to the integrated approach adopted by Nordic countries in their strategies and national solutions. Croatia expressed support for presenting the document as an annex or referenced in the Communiqué. Austria urged for an inclusive, integrated approach, expressing concern about diluting the social dimension, comment supported by the Belgium Flemish Community. Italy suggested a less prescriptive approach for the indicators.

Horia Onita addressed concerns about the indicators, distinguishing between monitoring for policy commitments and impact assessment. He emphasized that the proposed document does not imply that the indicators are the only ones for monitoring and evaluating social dimension policies. The focus is on detailing indicators to support the implementation of the PAGs. On making the indicators less prescriptive, he expressed difficulty without specific feedback and warned against a shift in paradigm without substantial data. Regarding the toolbox approach, he argued against its adoption, stating it would risk diluting the priority given to the PAGs. Ninoslav S. Schmidt proposed adding an annex or a suitable section at the end of the document to describe the concerns expressed. This disclaimer would clarify that the PAGs are not intended for countries with a general approach to social dimension. Additionally, he proposed to include a section in the BPIR social dimension chapter to address concerns and provide a context for reading the results, considering the unique perspectives of Nordic countries. This compromise aimed to respect the democratic process and accommodate various viewpoints within the BFUG. The Co-Chairs proposed a compromise for the next BFUG meeting, aiming to have the document approved and discussed. The proposal includes clarifying that the document is not an annex but should be adopted by ministers. Additionally, they suggested emphasizing that indicators and descriptors are not the exclusive means for achieving the PAGs, and there are alternative approaches, including aspects of universal design. The Co-Chairs expressed the need for concrete feedback to refine the document for the BFUG meeting in February. The main points involved adopting the document, avoiding the term "toolbox" for the document itself, and providing clarity on the use of indicators and descriptors for national authorities.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 4 1 WG SD Report](#), [BFUG ES GA 86 6 4 2 WG SD Principles, Guidelines, Indicators](#), [BFUG ES GA 86 6 4 3 WG SD Presentation](#)

6.5. Working Group on Learning & Teaching

Jon Altuna (WG on L&T, Co-Chair) delivered an update on the group's progress and meetings, highlighting three subgroups focusing on indicators for staff development, student-centred learning, and innovative teaching and learning. PLAs were organized, covering staff development in Paris, student-centred learning in Bucharest, and transformative approaches to learning & teaching in Dublin. Proposals for the Communiqué included recommendations for staff development, emphasizing integration of teacher pedagogical training for doctoral students and early career researchers.

Continuous professional development rooted in research, adaptable to various contexts, and focused on equality and inclusion was highlighted. Suggestions encompassed the creation of teaching and learning centres, mentorship programs for early career educators, and recognition of teaching's integral role in academia. For Student-Centred Learning (SCL), proposals advocated incorporating a commitment to SCL into legislation or national strategies, ensuring funding and support structures. A proposal for a thematic peer learning group on SCL within BFUG was introduced. In the context of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI), proposals emphasized the transformative power of these technologies, stressing ethical considerations. HEIs were urged to develop policies promoting ethical AI use, integrate ethical principles into digitalization efforts, and ensure transparency, fairness, and well-being. For Transformative Learning and Teaching, a recommendation was made for BFUG to develop a strategic approach, recognizing and promoting transformative approaches proactively, acknowledging diversity of learners, and considering individual student realities and broader societal challenges in transformative learning initiatives.

The Holy See commented on the proposal for a thematic peer learning group, emphasizing the need to clarify the nature of the groups first before discussing specifics.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 5 1 WG LT Update](#), [BFUG ES GA 86 6 5 2 WG LT Report](#)

6.6. Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue

Ann Katherine Isaacs (CG on GPD, Co-Chair) provided an update on the CG's activities and its subgroups. The GPF functional subgroup discussed a draft program during the 8th CG meeting and the Joint CG-ASEF meeting, presenting an updated version. Regional subgroups are in the process of compiling lists of invitees for the GPF, and a workstream focusing on communications, invitations, and content refinement is set to be established. Plans are underway for additional 'regional' conferences in early spring 2024, supported by IN-GLOBAL. A new regional subgroup for Arab states/Middle East and North Africa is proposed, with a planned meeting in conjunction with UNESCO in the spring, followed by a regional conference after the Tirana Ministerial Conference. The CG suggested

organizing dialogues and meetings on common interests between global interlocutors and EHEA Working Structures. The first meeting, between the Co-chairs of the Social Dimension WG and the USA's Institute for Evidence-based Change (IEBC), took place online on July 7.

A large-scale consultation on perceptions of the EHEA and ideas for collaboration has been conducted outside the EHEA, involving stakeholders, authorities, students, and teachers. Preliminary evaluations suggested a low degree of knowledge and interest in the EHEA among countries outside it. This aligns with the current strategy of promoting dialogue among macro regions rather than presenting the EHEA as a blueprint for others. Further work is required for a comprehensive analysis of the consultation results. It was also proposed to develop criteria and methods for recognizing countries expressing interest in aligning with or having a particular interest in the BFUG, with a suggested term for these countries as "EHEA global dialogue partners".

A plan for the Tirana GPF was presented, proposing a "sandwich model" where global guests would be observers on the first day. The second day would feature a plenary session for both EHEA and GPF representatives to discuss the statement. The following session would be a panel discussion, addressing topics like dialogue, internationalization, and mobility. Breakout groups with representatives from both groups would discuss themes from the statement and address challenges, focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The emergence of global dialogue with various regions, including Africa, Latin America, and Asia, was highlighted. The CG recognized the need for collaboration and shared learning, expressing enthusiasm for opportunities with UNESCO and engagement on regional conventions and SDGs.

Finland suggested exploring the possibility of focusing on one or two specific themes in the Tirana GPF for a more concentrated and in-depth dialogue, potentially centering on topics like mobility or internationalization. They recommended considering a more focused statement and program aligned with a single overarching theme for increased effectiveness.

The WG on SD Co-Chair expressed strong support for proposed initiatives, intending to host a session on social dimension, equity, and inclusion in higher education at the Tirana GPF. He informed that the WG on SD has been approached by consortia in the World Access to Higher Education Network, acknowledging the global relevance of their model. The Co-Chair emphasized the significance of collaborative discussions on inclusion and equity with these global partners.

EUA expressed support for the inclusion and equity theme, seeing its relevance to SDGs and global regions. They noted the potential length of the program, especially if integrated into the Ministerial Conference, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive overview and timely evaluation. EUA raised the issue of the invitation list, traditionally discussed in this context, and sought clarification on when it would be presented to the BFUG. Germany emphasized the need to align both agendas and consider combining topics for a more in-depth discussion. They inquired about the opportunity for written comments on the statement and whether it would be linked to the Tirana Communiqué. Germany also suggested acknowledging fundamental values and the related work in the context of global challenges during the GPF. ESU emphasized the importance of addressing global challenges like artificial intelligence, refugee issues and fundamental values in the GPF statement, as well as the need to discuss student-related matters and suggested the participation of other student platforms in the GPF.

The CG Co-Chair recognized the need for a focused approach, possibly on topics like mobility or equity and inclusion. She mentioned that regional groups were tasked with preparing a provisional list of invitees, and a CG meeting at the end of November would review these lists. The Co-Chair encouraged participants to submit proposals for partner organizations or individuals they would like to see invited. Regarding fundamental values, efforts have been made to address them on a universal level. The program's flexibility was acknowledged, and further clarification would be provided once the full comprehensive program and format are finalized.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 6 1 CG GPD Draft Proposal for the Global Policy Forum](#); [BFUG ES GA 86 6 6 2 CG GPD Draft 3 Global Policy Statement](#) and [BFUG ES GA 86 6 6 3 CG GPD Update](#)

6.7. Working Group on San Marino Roadmap

Jordi Llombart (WG on SMR, Co-Chair) presented the draft final WG report, emphasizing the positive collaboration with Sammarinese authorities. San Marino's commitment to higher education reform, aligned with the agreed roadmap, was also highlighted. He informed that the WG, now concluded, may have one final meeting before the Ministerial Conference to assess additional reforms. While acknowledging significant progress, the WG recommended in the Tirana Communiqué that ministers commend San Marino's efforts and encourage addressing remaining concerns. The WG suggested the continued use of roadmaps for new EHEA members, highlighting their effectiveness. Challenges related to profit-oriented higher education providers, particularly online, were noted, prompting a proposal to address transnational higher education and student protection in future BFUG work through common policy guidelines.

Remo Massari (San Marino) expressed gratitude to the WG members, recognizing the roadmap's value. He highlighted the positive impact of PLAs on legislative efforts aligned with Bologna requirements. San Marino has developed a legal framework for higher education and created a decree for establishing private HEIs, further aligning with EHEA principles. While significant progress has been made, there's ongoing work, particularly in developing the national qualification framework. He concluded by anticipating further steps in this area leading up to the Tirana Ministerial Conference.

Italy expressed gratitude for the group's work and commended San Marino on the positive roadmap results. They inquired about the future of the WG whether it would continue for the next period or be integrated into other working

structures and activities. The Co-Chair clarified that the WG has concluded its work, and San Marino is now considered well-equipped with the tools and knowledge to work independently within BFUG's structures.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 7 WG SMR Report](#)

6.8. EHEA Network of QF National Correspondents

Catherine Dolgova Dreyer (CoE) reported on the September meeting in Strasbourg, noting its alignment with the TPG A agenda. The primary focus was on micro-credentials and short cycles, emphasizing the need for clear guidelines while avoiding excessive regulation. Discussions focused on the legal basis for micro-credentials within the framework. Cooperation between the QF for EHEA was deemed valuable, with a proposal to present self-referencing reports at annual meetings. A suggestion was made to publish practical guidelines for self-referencing due to ongoing questions from some countries. Level five remained challenging for certain nations. Observations were made regarding the existence of qualification frameworks outside Europe, leading to confusion about the two overarching frameworks and their diversities. Challenges in the self-certification process and the role of external experts were discussed, suggesting the need for clearer guidelines. While acknowledging the annual meeting's distinct role from the EQF advisory group, it remains a platform for countries to present developments. She expressed consideration for the cost and overlap with the TPG, informing that there are plans under consideration of whether to continue this work in the next cycle.

6.9. Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community

Daniela Cristina Ghitulica (TF on EKS, Co-Chair) provided an update on the Task Force's activities and meetings. She highlighted the practical work on the Action Plan that began in February, focusing on two main components: drafting recommendations for BFUG members and creating communication tools related to the Bologna process. To develop recommendations, the TF on EKS distributed a questionnaire assessing stakeholder perceptions of the EHEA at the national level, receiving over 2400 responses from EHEA countries. Focus groups with government representatives, quality assurance agencies, ENIC-NARICs, promotion agencies, and HEIs were organized, and their insights will inform the recommendations. Breakout sessions with BFUG members, postponed to the next BFUG meeting, will aim to gather best practices, discuss recommendations, and identify new issues.

The first draft of recommendations, available on the website, focuses on ensuring greater engagement of higher education in BFUG work. Key recommendations include setting up national Bologna expert teams and hubs, proposing a reform to the TF, and establishing a Coordination Group within the BFUG. The Coordination Group would support the evolving work of the BFUG, explaining and sharing new knowledge with the academic community. The last recommendation emphasizes securing resources and funding for functional shared knowledge activities. Key action points for various stakeholders were also outlined, including organizing Bologna events or seminars, conducting online information sessions about the Ministerial Communiqué, and establishing bodies or units within ministries to coordinate Bologna process activities.

The TF has undertaken dissemination activities, creating videos and messages on EHEA policies and reforms, aiming to develop written scripts for national-level use. A draft script on the Bologna process is available and three videos on mobilities have been produced. The TF plans to propose an event for the next BFUG meeting, featuring a TF coordinator presenting products and BFUG insights. Appreciation was given to the Secretariat for the newsletter, with encouragement to the BFUG to promote the TF's social media using the slogan "transforming education together."

EUA emphasized the need for consultation on the campaign, especially regarding slogans and logos. Special remarks were made about the newsletter, appreciating it but suggesting a need for clarity on frequency, content types, and target groups. EUA encouraged applying criteria for articles to determine the newsletter's official information source status. Regarding planned information activities for the upcoming BFUG meeting, EUA questioned the target audience and suggested reflecting on the appropriateness of certain promotional tools, considering the level of familiarity and dedication of BFUG members to the Bologna process.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 9 1 TF EKS Recommendations to BFUG](#), [BFUG ES GA 86 6 9 2 TF EKS Report](#) and [BFUG ES GA 86 6 9 3 TF EKS Update](#)

6.10. Task Force on the Review of Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA community

Michal Karpisek (TF on RR, Co-Chair) reflected on the 25-year achievements of the Bologna Process and outlined the future focus on European cooperation in higher education. He reiterated the TF's mandate and noted that after the discussions at the BFUG meeting in Stockholm, the proposal to establish a more permanent Secretariat by 2024 was deemed as too ambitious. Instead, the timeline has been proposed to change to 2027 providing sufficient time to explore the general direction. The Co-Chair presented a list of benefits and issues for both the present rotating and the proposed more permanent Secretariat. He also suggested to focus the discussion on the overall direction rather than details in the proposal. The suggestion is therefore that the Ministerial Conference may task the BFUG to establish a Secretariat by 2027. He highlighted the need for further clarification and detailed discussions, focusing on determining the viability of a permanent Secretariat as a long-term solution and proposing principles outlined in the document.

Michael Gaebel (TF on RR, Co-Chair) conveyed that the revised rules of procedure now consist of just one document with two interconnected parts: one outlining rules of procedure for ministers and the other the rules of procedure for the BFUG. He explained that the TF aimed to enhance clarity by making existing rules and practices more explicit and less ambiguous, also working on harmonizing terminology. Two notable changes introduced since the Stockholm

meeting included the requirement for a larger quorum for voting and a section on the Secretariat, relevant to both a permanent and a rotating Secretariat.

The TF identified two potential solutions for the Secretariat, either as an NGO to be established, or to be provided by an organization related to the Bologna Process. Before deciding for either option, the Co-Chairs emphasized the need to agree on the scope, format, and tasks of the Secretariat. The TF proposed five key driving principles, including independence, increased accountability to the BFUG, sustainability, and a stable staff, and to be non-profit. Its cost were to be shared among Bologna Process members, with a contribution from the European Commission. The benefits of a fit-for-purpose Secretariat with experienced staff and ample resources were underscored, focusing on its adaptability, neutrality, and professional commitment. This would mark the first time the Secretariat operates fully accountable and reports exclusively to the BFUG, with advantages extending to institutional memory and improved process management. The goal is to secure resources by 2030, anticipating positive impacts on the work's visibility within Europe and globally. Feedback on the general approach and format, with an emphasis on major points of agreement or disagreement, was sought.

Austria supported establishing a fully independent permanent secretariat after 2027 and emphasized the need for a separate legal entity with its own working environment. It also advised that Ministers should need also to commitment to contribute to the costs.

CoE clarified that during discussions on the permanent secretariat within the BFUG, they proposed a joint program with the EC in May 2023, in which they did not receive any feedback from the TF. From the prepared documents by the TF, they noted a document that analyzed their proposal and drew conclusions they considered unrealistic. Expressing discomfort with the document's interpretations, the CoE emphasized the importance of negotiations and financial considerations for progress. They requested that the section related to the CoE in the document be disregarded and expressed openness to considering their proposal if there was interest.

The Holy See raised a point of order, expressing concern that the documents regarding the permanent secretariat, including the Word document and the PowerPoint presentation, were available on the public website. The Holy See emphasized that while the documents stated that the majority of delegations supported the permanent secretariat proposal, this may only reflect the majority of those who spoke, not necessarily the overall sentiment.

The request was made to take down the documents from the website to ensure accuracy and prevent any misinterpretation.

Iceland proposed the removal of parallel sessions from the agenda to enhance discussions on priority topics before the Ministerial and to allocate more time for pertinent matters. The Holy See commented on the parallel sessions, highlighting their intention to also facilitate discussions on the role and structures of the Secretariat. The Holy See advocated for retaining the parallel sessions, emphasizing the need to address fundamental issues before engaging in discussions on rules of procedure.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 6 10 1 TF RR Update](#), [BFUG ES GA 86 6 10 2 TF RR Report](#), [BFUG ES GA 86 6 10 3 EHEA and BFUG](#)

7. Drafting Committee for the Tirana 2024 Ministerial Communiqué - Zero draft

Melanie Rosenbaum (DC, Co-Chair) reported that the DC had analyzed past Communiqués and identified a misalignment between Ministerial commitments and recent policy discussions. Additionally, there were emerging issues yet to be systematically addressed, along with various sub-structure topics like micro-credentials, AI, and lifelong learning that required more substantial attention. Seeking input on implementation, the 2024-27 period, and the outlook until 2030, the DC aimed to craft a three to five-page standalone policy document. Despite soliciting contributions, not all groups had submitted input before the zero draft, thus draft 0.1 was recognized as an initial attempt combining existing contributions. The Co-Chair informed participants about the availability of draft 0.1 on the EHEA website, explaining that green sections denoted post-board contributions, while yellow sections signaled areas needing input. The DC underscored a general approach for feedback at this stage, with detailed formulations to be refined in subsequent proposals. Future discussions would center on the "future of Bologna," considering previous questions, contributions, and decisions highlighted in the draft in "yellow."

Italy acknowledged the importance of fundamental values, but asserted that they should not be the sole focus of the document; highlighted the absence of references to refugees and micro-credentials; and expressed the need for reformulation on the section on learning and teaching and AI. Italy suggested separating discussions on COVID and the Russia invasion to give each concept its due emphasis. They stressed the importance on the need for continuous professional development that extends beyond researchers and scholars to include administrative staff in different roles. Regarding the ratification and implementation of the global convention, Italy recommended highlighting the significance of the Lisbon dialogue among regional conventions first before addressing the global convention, as the regional ones are currently more active.

Armenia pointed out breaches of fundamental values by Russia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan in the EHEA. They highlighted challenges, suggesting the inclusion of all three countries' names in the document.

Finland raised considerations about the changing environment since the previous Communiqué, questioning how the Bologna process should adapt to current circumstances. They expressed the need for attention to quality assurance and mobility benchmarks, and highlighted the importance of linking the basics of Bologna's key commitments made in discussions with the implementation reports of countries, proposing further discussion on this idea and the potential ministerial endorsement of these commitments.

France proposed that the upcoming Ministerial Communiqué should aspire to identify strategies for strengthening and expanding the 3Is vision for the year 2030, centered on key priorities which could function as a roadmap for the EHEA, akin to a previous Budapest-Vienna declaration.

The DC Co-Chair clarified that the current document is a compilation of late-arriving contributions, preventing further drafting. The green text, originating from proposals of working structures rather than the DC, was submitted for feedback to the BFUG. The intent was for the BFUG to delve deeper into the proposed issues during parallel sessions, deciding whether to pursue them.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 7 Tirana Communiqué Draft-0.1](#) and [BFUG ES GA 86 7 1 Drafting Committee Update](#)

8. Plenary session on the discussions about the Tirana Communiqué: Future of Bologna

The Spanish BFUG Co-Chair informed that on the deliberation on proceeding with or without parallel sessions, the prevailing preference among participants was to omit them. Consequently, the consensus was to continue solely with the plenary session. Participants were urged to present their comments individually. Additionally, the proposal to decide whether documents regarding the permanent secretariat should be publicly accessible on the website or exclusively shared via email with BFUG members would have to be reached.

The predominant feedback from participants underscored the imperative of rendering the draft Communiqué more concise, shorter, and politically oriented, with a well-structured vision. Strong support was expressed for including mobility, micro-credentials, refugees, recognition, enhanced global connections, lifelong learning, the situation in Ukraine, fundamental values, quality assurance and transnational education. The recommendation was made to center the document around the three Is vision. There was a recognized necessity for task prioritization in the upcoming working period and discussions on establishing BFUG working structures.

Additional comments underscored the importance of emphasizing the connection between education and research, also in the context of the green and digital transitions in labor markets. Further recommendations included suggestion for revision of the ESGs by incorporating elements of employability and research-based learning. It was suggested to adopt a more student-centered and lifelong perspective on employability, with a focus on sustainable careers and supporting learners in reskilling and upskilling within higher education systems. Additionally, there was a proposal to recognize short cycle higher education as a pertinent qualification level.

Further, it was proposed to segregate themes on COVID and the Russia invasion to provide each concept with its appropriate emphasis. Furthermore, ESU urged that ministers formally exclude Russia from the Bologna process, citing a misalignment with Bologna process values. EUA suggested reflecting on the continued suspension of Russia rather than outright exclusion, underscoring the necessity for a more comprehensive discussion.

Azerbaijan underscored the non-political nature of BFUG and rejected Armenia's comment, firmly opposing the inclusion of political statements in the Communiqué.

Croatia raised concerns about the designation of student-centered learning as a distinct working structure, proposing its integration into the existing WG on L&T. They also recommended reformulating regulated professions, specifying that it may apply solely to EU countries under the directive.

Hungary suggested changing the wording for migration experiences, with a focus on the help provided by the European countries to Ukrainian refugees if "refugee experiences" is chosen. They advocated for prioritizing equality between women and men and women's participation in STEM over gender identity concerns. Hungary expressed reservations about the idea of a permanent BFUG Secretariat and the strong language on allocating resources for inclusion and equality, citing ongoing feasibility analysis. Hungary also proposed a fundamental rethinking of a political involvement of the BFUG and of mentioning the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Communiqué.

Iceland suggested viewing the current proposal as a working document rather than a first draft, and recommended starting anew, citing the Yerevan Communiqué as a potential model. They urged caution regarding commitments requiring financial contributions from higher education ministers and stressed the importance of inclusive language, expressing reservations about framing gender equality in binary terms.

Ireland suggested incorporating the EU Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications and highlighting the recent commission recommendation on the recognition of qualifications for third-country nationals.

Italy emphasized the promotion of automatic recognition, the creation of platform tools or frameworks, compliance with the 2022 monitoring report's recommendations, and the use of digital solutions for maintaining academic integrity. They supported ongoing PLAs and noted the continuation of BICG as a working structure.

The CoE suggested incorporating the 70th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, emphasizing its connection to the Bologna Process. They proposed expanding on the promotion of democratic citizenship beyond students. On the impact higher education is anticipated to have in addressing global and European challenges, they acknowledged the need for clarification in terms of challenges. The CoE agreed with the mention of refugees and welcomed referencing the EQPR, echoing support for the ETINED platform and its ongoing glossary development. The CoE advocated for highlighting support for men in teaching professions to address imbalances. The CoE suggested that the document on the permanent Secretariat can be retained or removed at the discretion of others but noted that maintaining the document in its current state may be somewhat redundant.

EI ETUCE stressed the comprehensive support needed for HEIs, and urged discussions on working conditions and career paths in academia within the teaching and learning paragraph.

The EC highlighted the importance of student-centered learning, academic careers, and the recognition of teachers' work as essential building blocks. They stressed the significance of quality assurance systems for transnational cooperation and cautioned against regression in the domain of automatic recognition.

ENQA called for synergies and cross-checks between the Communiqué and the Global Policy Statement. EQAR expressed a desire for increased efforts in utilizing the data they have gathered, and emphasized the importance of leveraging it to support recognition, mobility, and cooperation across countries, including global collaboration. EQAR suggested continuous support from ministers for further developments and innovations within EQAR and collaborations with other databases and tools.

ESU noted the significance of International Students Day during the BFUG meeting, emphasizing the symbolic importance of fostering an academic community dedicated to freedom and democracy, especially given the contemporary challenges of populism and extremism across Europe. ESU advocated for student participation as a fundamental value not only at national or institutional level, but also at European level, including in alliances or in the developments of transnational joint programmes, and urged a concrete element in promoting sustainability within the EHEA, as well as revision of the ECTS. They proposed the establishment of a working group on internationalization and mobility, addressing the current transversal approach's limitations. ESU emphasized the need for inclusive language, supporting the retention of gender identity and addressing emerging issues relevant to students.

Eurodoc, representing the interests of PhD candidates and doctoral students, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate at the BFUG meeting. They emphasized the need to distinguish between students and PhD candidates, highlighting the unique position of doctoral candidates as a specific group in the academic environment. Eurodoc underscored the distinct characteristics of doctoral candidates, often serving both as students and educators simultaneously. They suggested acknowledging this distinction in the draft Communiqué and expressed a desire to collaborate with BFUG in future endeavors, potentially as a consultative member.

Norway highlighted the absence of references to AI, climate change, and sustainability in discussions. They emphasized the need to equip students with skills for defending democratic systems and fostering critical thinking, and suggested a cautious approach to proposing structures like those for student-centered learning, recommending that some details may be more appropriate at the institutional level rather than in the Communiqué.

Romania supported the emphasis on student-centered learning, citing the effectiveness of recommendations from the TF on EKS. They suggested incorporating references to the social role of higher education and ensuring alignment with national-level entities for fit-for-purpose procedures on transnational quality assurance.

Slovenia advocated for a qualitative and interactive approach to addressing challenges. They discussed potential conflicts between political endorsement of student-centered learning and academic freedom for teachers. Slovenia also commented on the social dimension, expressing concerns about a potential contradiction between diversity and the long-standing university value of meritocracy. They suggested addressing this conflict within the broader context of university ideologies.

The DC Co-Chair thanked all participants for their feedback and announced that the DC would convene after the BFUG meeting to further discuss the received feedback. Participants were encouraged to communicate any concerns about the text and share their priorities with the DC, facilitating the grouping of priorities within the 3Is vision.

The Co-Chair emphasized the necessity for BFUG to engage in a comprehensive discussion on future structures before delving into individual structures. Acknowledging that the Working Structures' reports had not yet been adopted, it was clarified that the next BFUG meeting would involve adopting the reports and making decisions. Concrete commitments in the Communiqué related to the work plan would follow this adoption.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 8 Future of Bologna](#)

11. Task Force on the Review of Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA community

Michael Gaebel (TF Co-Chair) recommended prioritizing feedback on the feasibility of the permanent Secretariat, and participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on what is possible and anticipated challenges based on prior discussions in their ministries.

17 delegations¹ favored the establishment of a permanent Secretariat, while 3 delegations² did not express a preference, and Italy maintained a neutral stance. The Belgium French Community leaned towards a rotating Secretariat but was open to a permanent one if decided, suggesting alternative solutions for a secretariat with permanent staff or rotating staff seconded by the BFUG members. Supporters of a permanent Secretariat emphasized benefits such as stability, continuity, independence, accountability, and institutional memory. The preference was for an independent NGO model rather than being affiliated with an existing organization, along with a call for hosting. Most agreed on the cost-sharing model, with the feasible period being after 2027. Concerns were raised about the lack of legal advice in the document, prompting the need for expert input on the proposed structure. A comment was raised regarding ensuring the continued engagement of BFUG members with a professional Secretariat. Discussions included finding solutions for the 2024-2027 period and reaching decisions and commitments from all member states by the Tirana Ministerial Conference. Andorra suggested continuing with the current Secretariat until 2027 if nobody volunteers to hold the secretariat for the period 2024-27.

¹ Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium Flemish Community, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, EQAR, ESU, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, The Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden.

² Andorra, Holy See, Spain.

Austria expressed reservations about using a voting mechanism, emphasizing the importance of delegations consulting with their ministers beforehand. They urged discussions to consider financial commitments post-2027, highlighting the need for consensus and active participation from all member states. Regarding concerns about non-payment, Austria proposed establishing a reserve fund contributed by all member states to ensure the Secretariat's continuity.

The TF Co-Chairs concluded that the majority of parties that spoke expressed support for the permanent Secretariat. The goal would be to establish the Secretariat by 2027, contingent on a commitment from ministers in the Tirana Communiqué. The intention would be to enhance functionality, but not to further expand the work plan and workload. The Secretariat should be evaluated after two periods. Independence of the Secretariat was emphasized, and its staff would be contracted with provisions for dismissal if necessary. Exploring scenarios, the possibility of the BFUG becoming a membership organization was mentioned, which should not change its governance principles. The TF Co-Chairs concluded by underscoring that a political decision from the BFUG is needed, recognizing that certain details may not be entirely clear, but a collective stance on the proposal at this stage is crucial.

11.2. Discussion on the Rules of Procedure

ESU underlined to have more precise definitions for the role and functions of the Board, BFUG Co-Chairs, Vice-Chair, deeming the current proposal as too general. In addition, ESU highlighted a lack of mention in the minister-approved document regarding the role of the Vice Chair and the Board, as well as membership criteria for consultative members, expressing the importance of including these details in the document by ministers. Additionally, ESU welcomed the introduction of a two-thirds quorum but remained unconvinced about certain aspects of voting procedures, intending to discuss these issues further in the upcoming Board and BFUG meetings.

The Holy See added renaming the document as "Rules of Procedure" and raised concerns about the interchangeable use of terms like members, states, or countries. They emphasized the need for discretionary language ("may") due to the voluntary nature of the process. Additionally, the Holy See highlighted confusion regarding the relationship between the EHEA and the Bologna process. They stressed the importance of addressing the relationship between BFUG delegates and WG representatives, including communication aspects. Furthermore, the Holy See pointed out the absence of a section on the conduct of business in the document.

They urged the inclusion of details on how sessions are led, decisions are made, and points of order are addressed—elements integral to the rules of procedure in international organizations.

There was an emphasis on the importance of clarifying the voting regime, underscoring that Part One should concentrate on guiding principles and general agreements necessitating ministerial decisions. Detailed implementation was proposed to be left to BFUG's discretion in Part Two. The notion of voting on Communiqués faced opposition, with the CoE highlighting the significance of allowing countries to express reservations through footnotes. Moreover, they recommended using the term "should develop" instead of "may develop" concerning BFUG's potential creation of a code of ethics.

France highlighted that the responsibility for hosting the GPF should remain with the hosting country. Additionally, they specified that the appointment of heads of the Secretariat and its funding should only be possible in the context of a permanent secretariat. France called for clarification on what the Board may vote on. Germany sought clarification on the term "binding policy instruments," expressing a need for a better understanding of its legal implications. Norway emphasized the need for rules regarding the admission and exclusion of members or consultative members and financial commitments, and need for clarity regarding the voting regime. Finland noted that the role of the BFUG partners required further clarification. ESU highlighted the need to distinguish between political commitments and guidelines/recommendations, emphasizing that nothing in the Bologna Process is legally binding, nevertheless politically binding. They proposed using abstention as a means to address concerns about a minority blocking content. ESU also raised a point about membership criteria, expressing the importance of referencing past BFUG decisions and the potential loss of crucial elements without such references in the current document. The Belgium Flemish Community emphasized need for a more detailed adaptation regarding the composition of delegations. They suggested including BFUG delegates in the delegation alongside representatives from HEIs and students.

Michael Gaebel (TF on RR, Co-Chair) acknowledged the received feedback, emphasizing that voting is an exceptional means of decision-making. He highlighted the rarity of voting in BFUG's past practices, citing challenges regarding not voting on content. He expressed difficulty in creating a list of what should not be voted on, particularly considering the political binding nature of decisions, as opposed to legal binding. He suggested minimizing voting as much as possible without imposing significant limitations. The TF Co-Chairs informed members that they would revise the document, and encouraged them to send written feedback.

13. Update from the Consultative Members

13.1. EUA

Michael Gaebel (EUA) informed that the Secretariat has dispatched an email containing the [recommendations](#) of EUA on the Erasmus+ interim review. Stressing the significance of input from higher education sectors throughout Europe, he highlighted the ongoing consultation by the EC, which extends until the 8th of December.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 1 EUA Update](#)

13.2. ESU

Horia Onita (ESU) provided an update on the Bologna with Student Eyes 20/24 edition, emphasizing its significance as a 20th-anniversary edition with focus is on curating data from the National Union of Students. ESU recently adopted statements on sustainable development and mobility. The upcoming General Assembly (Board meeting) will address policy papers on the social dimension, artificial intelligence, and gender-based violence. He highlighted the Erasmus+ project "PLAR-U-PAGs," announcing an upcoming PLA linked to the WG on SD on 6-7 December in Ghent. An invitation to participate in the survey and nominate representatives was extended for the PLA. Additionally, ESU joined the executive leadership of UNESCO's SDG4Youth Network, enhancing its international cooperation.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 2 ESU Report](#)

13.3. EURASHE

Jakub Grodecki (EURASHE) outlined priorities such as the social dimension, stakeholder engagement, lifelong learning support, employability skills, strategic partnerships, innovation, and the role of applied higher education. He mentioned ongoing communities of practice on research skills and quality assurance, open to interested individuals beyond EURASHE members, particularly those in applied science universities. He also highlighted EURASHE's annual conference in Austria from May 23-24, preceding the Ministerial Conference.

Jon Altuna (Vice President, EURASHE) emphasized the organization's new strategy, with added concerns about local and regional impact and transnational cooperation. He also mentioned the recent appointment of a new president in June in Bucharest.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 3 EURASHE Update](#)

13.4. EQAR

Magalie Soenen (EQAR) provided an update on the register of QA agencies, noting two new agencies added since the committee meetings in June and October, along with six renewals. She highlighted the appointment of the new president, Stéphane Lauwick, and changes in statutes and rules of procedure confirmed during an extraordinary general assembly in autumn. Regarding DEQAR, she mentioned key statistics, with approximately 92,000 reports and an expected peak of 100,000 in spring 2024 as the platform includes alternative providers and micro-credentials. She also mentioned the third PLA organized within the IMINQA project on the European approach to QA of joint programs in September, with a forthcoming thematic analysis based on DEQAR data and PLA outcomes.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 4 EQAR Report](#)

13.5. Council of Europe

Catherine Dolgova Dreyer (CoE) reported on several events, including the fourth summit of heads of states and the Ministerial Conference in Reykjavik, focusing on civic mission renewal, education during crises, and AI in education. The Ministerial Conference adopted the Council of Europe's first-ever education strategy, guiding plans until 2030. She emphasized the strategy's impact on higher education, with projects aligned and a revamped subgroup on higher education policy. She also introduced a new project, "Academic Freedom in Action," awaiting approval in March 2024. Notable outputs include a recommendation on the European qualification passport for refugees and an observatory on countering education fraud. Additionally, a poll for projects for ENIC centers, ineligible for NARIC call, was launched.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 5 Council of Europe Report](#)

13.8. Education International

Andreas Keller (EI ETUCE) presented a preliminary call to the ministers of the Bologna process for the upcoming Ministerial Conference in 2024. The draft emphasizes the crucial role of academics, teachers, and researchers in achieving quality higher education. It underscored the significance of elements such as academic freedom, governance, decent working conditions, job security, health and safety, and the protection of intellectual property rights for ensuring the quality of education for these professionals. He encouraged open discussions and collaboration among EHEA members and consultative members to address these issues in preparation for the Ministerial Conference, inviting interested parties to refer to the call.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 6 EI ETUCE Call to Bologna Process Ministers](#)

13.9. ENQA

Anna Gover (ENQA) shared information on the launch of the third phase of the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA). The HAQAA initiative builds on previous work since 2015, including the development of African standards and guidelines for quality assurance. The five-year initiative focuses on various strands of work, such as quality issues, the African credit transfer system, continental integration, and data collection for policymaking. She highlighted an upcoming policy dialogue event in Barcelona in January, in collaboration with the Africa subgroup of the CG on GPD. ENQA's involvement in the QA fit project, which gathers data on ESG revision, was also noted, along with the launch of their new quarterly newsletter for those interested in following ENQA's work.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 12 7 ENQA Report](#)

14. Information by the Incoming Co-Chairs (Belgium Flemish and French Community and Holy See)

14.1. BFUG Board Meetings LXXXV and LXXXVII (Holy See, Vatican City State)

S.E. Mons. Paul Tighe (Incoming BFUG Co-chair, Holy See) provided insights into the Holy See's higher education system, distinguishing between ecclesiastical universities/faculties and Catholic universities, emphasizing the global network's presence in various continents. The Holy See's higher education degrees, spanning subjects like theology and philosophy, are adapted to local priorities, and Holy See's global recognition in various conventions was also highlighted. S.E. Mons. Paul Tighe concluded by extending an invitation to the BFUG to visit the Vatican City for the upcoming Board meetings.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 13 1 Holy See Presentation](#)

14.2. BFUG Meetings LXXXVI and LXXXVIII (Brussels)

Caroline Hollela (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium French Community) shared details about the education agenda during their presidency involving all three communities in Belgium. The collaboration extends to the Flemish and Belgian German-speaking communities, each with its independent higher education system based on language. Liesbeth Hens (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium Flemish Community) highlighted the unique absence of a federal level for education, making the three communities entirely independent in education competence. Presidency priorities were outlined including evidence-informed education, mobility, lifelong learning, and digital education. Three flagship conferences are planned, with special emphasis on evidence-informed education, digital education dialogues, and lifelong learning. The Incoming Co-Chairs concluded by welcoming everyone to the upcoming BFUG meetings to be held in Brussels in February and April 2024.

For more information, please see: [BFUG ES GA 86 13 Belgium Flemish and French Community Presentation](#)

15. AOB

Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice-Chair) announced the dates for the Ministerial Conference 2024 in Tirana, scheduled for May 29 and 30, 2024. She provided logistical information about the venue and its surroundings, and mentioned that the GPF would be integrated within these two days in a sandwich format. While the social program details are yet to be defined, she informed that information would be shared as soon as possible, exploring the possibility of events during the meeting and the days following.

The Secretariat was requested to email the BFUG with all the deadlines set by the Working Structures for feedback and comments on their respective documents. The Head of the Secretariat provided information on the deadlines for submitting documents for the upcoming Board and BFUG meetings, set for January 8 and February 4, respectively. Regarding the Ministerial Conference, the Secretariat inquired if BFUG Working Structures wished to organize an event during these dates and requested notification for potential assistance with local stakeholders and businesses. Between February 20 and 22, the Secretariat would circulate the candidates to BFUG members for the next hosting country. For those not attending the BFUG meetings, if there were multiple applications, they were instructed to send their voting to the Secretariat, and procedures were detailed on the [BFUG meeting LXXXIV webpage](#).

Liesbeth Hens (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair, Belgium Flemish Community) emphasized finalizing the reports of the BFUG working structures by the first BFUG meeting. It was suggested reevaluating the agenda preparation process to allocate more space for discussions, as well as to indicate where the BFUG needs to make decisions. Liesbeth Hens responded, stating that due to the approaching Ministerial Conference and the conclusion of the working period, the Co-Chairs might propose changes to the common agenda structure.

EUROSTUDENT informed about upcoming reports before the Ministerial Conference on mental health, discrimination issues, digitalization, and midterm effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The final report is expected in July at the final conference in Vienna. EUROSTUDENT also invited countries to consider participating in the next round of EUROSTUDENT, starting in the summer and requiring decisions by September.

No other business was brought forward, thus the meeting was successfully concluded with thanks to the BFUG Chairs, BFUG Secretariat and the members for their contribution and support.