

EHEA 2020 - What next?

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Bucharest, 5 April 2019

History of this discussion

- June 2008 – Extraordinary BFUG meeting in Sarajevo (13b);
- September 2014 – BFUG meeting in Rome (41);
- April 2019 – BFUG meeting in Bucharest (65).

Generally, the debate had three parts in the past: what can be done to move things along regarding existing EHEA priorities, what should be the future priorities and governance arrangements to underpin them?

This time, the focus was overwhelmingly on the future.

Research views

Generally, researchers view the EHEA as:

- A loose framework for voluntary cooperation and of peer learning (Harmsen 2015);
- Voluntary cooperation framework, with special attention to peer learning, but once commitments have been undertaken, implementation is not optional. (External) trust in the EHEA relies on this last point (Bergan 2015, Strand Vidarsdottir 2018);
- A form of inter-governmental cooperation lacking mechanisms for accountability and transparency, as it would have had if it were set up under the EU or CoE umbrella.

Measuring success in the EHEA

- Matei et al (2018) argue that success should be looked at from various vantage points, as the BP can be looked at as a:
 - Political process – at the European and national level;
 - Policy process – at the European, national and institutional level.
- Success in implementation is also measured in relation to perceived goals or intentions. Not all BFUG members understand the EHEA Communiqués in the same way, let alone national authorities or academic communities...Plus, implementation is never a linear process, it involves re-conceptualization and gaining ownership.

Why is it so hard to go beyond the present?

- Difficult discussions about the character of the Bologna Process;
- Lack of political attractiveness to talk about the Bologna Process at the national level in most EHEA countries;
- Euroscepticism;
- Expansion of the EHEA priorities over the years...etc.

The discussion seems to revolve around “what else should we do?” or “how should we change the structures”, when in fact **the problem is a political one** – “what do we want from Europe when it comes to HE cooperation?”.

Synthesis of yesterday's discussions

- Main priorities: social dimension/ LLL + teaching and learning/ SCL;
- A lot of points made on the increasingly complex role of HE and HEIs, importance of flexibility in order to cater for diverse learner profiles and the role of digitalization;
- Expansion of the recognition, QF and QA frameworks to new types of learning: online, LLL, blended, micro-qualifications etc;
- A general feeling that identifying key commitments and focusing on enhancing the level of implementation starts to work at national level;
- Underlining once more the importance of the EHEA fundamental values, with concrete actions to guarantee that they remain the cornerstone of the Area.

Opportunities and way forward

- EHEA/ EEA mutual support over time, with varying degrees of ambition (e.g. structural reforms, the mobility benchmark, SCL, European Universities). Value in setting ambitious political goals;
- Policy framing – make politically attractive some key areas of the EHEA (e.g. social dimension – in light of the demographic situation and political developments);
- Use tested approaches – e.g. the development of the ESG by stakeholders, followed by an EHEA members adoption – for other potential issues, such as institutional autonomy and academic freedom;

Opportunities and way forward

- Rebuild a strong link between the EHEA and its characteristics, especially structural reforms, and broader political concerns: democracy, fight against populism, a competitive Europe based on values, SDGs etc;
- Not be afraid to recognize some steps were in the wrong direction and learn from the experience (e.g. dismantling the Bologna expert teams at the national level, discursive closure at the national level, not making public the national implementation reports that were submitted for the 2015 Paris MC).

Happy to discuss!