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BFUG Meeting LXXVI
Hosted by Portugal (online)
April 15-16, 2021

Minutes

List of Participants

	Delegation	First Name	Family Name(s)
1	Albania (BFUG Vice Chair)	Linda	Pustina
2	Albania	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
3	Albania	Ilirjana	Topulli
4	Andorra (Guest), Director of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education	Josep	Areny
5	Andorra (BFUG Co-chair)	Jordi	Llombart
6	Andorra	Mar	Martinez
7	Armenia (Incoming BFUG Co-chair)	Gayane	Harutyunyan
8	Armenia	Samvel	Karabekyan
9	Austria	Helga	Posset
10	Austria	Stephan	De Pasqualin
11	Belarus	Elena	Betenya
12	Belarus	Vadim	Bogush
13	Belgium Flemish Community	Magalie	Soenen
14	Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
15	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Petar	Marić
16	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Aida	Đurić
17	Bulgaria	Ivana	Radonova
18	Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
19	Council of Europe	Katia	Dolgova-Dreyer
20	Croatia	Loredana	Maravić
21	Croatia	Leonardo	Marušić
22	Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
23	Cyprus	Yiannis	Kasoulides
24	Czech Republic	Karolína	Gondková
25	Czech Republic	Lenka	Škrábalová
26	Denmark	Anders	Mihle
27	Denmark	Jonas	Johannesen
28	ENQA	Maria	Kelo
29	EQAR	Karl	Dittrich
30	EQAR	Colin	Tück
31	Estonia	Janne	Pukk
32	ESU	Martina	Darmanin
33	ESU	Jakub	Grodecki

34	ETUCE	Andreas	Keller
35	ETUCE	Agnes	Roman
36	EUA	Michael	Gaebel
37	EUA	Tia	Loukkola
38	EURASHE	Stéphane	Lauwick
39	EURASHE	Michal	Karpíšek
40	European Commission	Vanessa	Debiais-Sainton
41	European Commission	Klara	Engels-Perenyi
42	European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova
43	European Commission/Eurydice	David	Crosier
44	EUROSTUDENT	Kristina	Hauschildt
45	Finland	Maija	Innola
46	Finland	Jonna	Korhonen
47	France	Hélène	Lagier
48	Georgia	Khatia	Tsiramua
49	Germany (Outgoing BFUG Co-chair)	Peter	Greisler
50	Germany (Outgoing BFUG Co-chair)	Frank	Petrikowski
51	Germany	Marius	Michalski
52	Greece	Alexandra	Karvouni
53	Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
54	Hungary	Marianna	Bodolai-Marcsek
55	Iceland	Una Strand	Viðarsdóttir
56	Ireland	Joseph	Gleeson
57	Italy (Outgoing BFUG Vice-chair)	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
58	Italy	Chiara	Finocchietti
59	Italy (Outgoing BFUG Secretariat)	Vera	Lucke
60	Kazakhstan	Saltanat	Sadybekova
61	Kazakhstan	Akzhunis	Artykbay
62	Latvia	Daiga	Ivsina
63	Liechtenstein	Daniel	Miescher
64	Luxembourg	Isabelle	Reinhardt
65	Malta	Rose Anne	Cuschieri
66	Malta	Tanya	Sammut-Bonnici
67	Moldova	Nadejda	Velisco
68	Montenegro	Kristina	Ljuljđuraj
69	The Netherlands	Berto	Bosscha
70	The Netherlands	Emmy	Heijmans
71	North Macedonia	Borco	Aleksov
72	Norway	Tone Flood	Strøm
73	Norway	Pia Solli	Sellereite
74	Poland	Maria	Boltruszko
75	Poland	Ilona	Juszczuk
76	Portugal (Guest), Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Portugal	Manuel	Heitor

77	Portugal (BFUG Co-chair)	Maria de Lurdes	Correia Fernandes
78	Portugal (BFUG Co-chair)	Ana	Mateus
79	Portugal	Angela	Noiva
80	Portugal	Afonso	Oliveira Martins
81	Portugal	Marcos	Carreiro
82	Romania	Cristina	Ghițulică
83	Romania	Mihai Cezar	Haj
84	Russian Federation	Nadezda	Kamynina
85	San Marino	Remo	Massari
86	San Marino	Monica	Cavalli
87	San Marino	Maria Elena	D'Amelio
88	Slovak Republic	Jozef	Jurković
89	Slovenia (Incoming BFUG Co-chair)	Duša	Marjetić
90	Slovenia	Darinka	Vrecko
91	Slovenia	Marija	Skerlj
92	Slovenia	Andrej	Kotnik
93	Slovenia	Jana	Sedej
94	Spain	Margarita	De Lezcano-Mújica Núñez
95	Sweden	Robin	Moberg
96	Switzerland	Aurelia	Robert-Tissot
97	Turkey	Tuncay	Döğeroğlu
98	Turkey	Elif	Huntürk
99	Ukraine	Kateryna	Suprun
100	Ukraine	Oleksandr	Smyrnov
101	UNESCO	Peter	Wells
102	UNESCO	Rika	Yorozu
103	United Kingdom	Emma	Brodie
104	United Kingdom/Scotland	Michael	Watney
105	BFUG Secretariat (Head, Albania)	Enida	Bezhani
106	BFUG Secretariat (Albania)	Aida	Myrto
107	BFUG Secretariat (Albania)	Enis	Fida
108	BFUG Secretariat (Albania)	Ersi	Dani
109	BFUG Secretariat (Albania)	Irma	Sheqi
110	BFUG Secretariat (IT support, Albania)	Ana	Hoxha

***Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, this BFUG meeting was held online. No regrets were received. Azerbaijan, Belgium German-speaking Community, Business Europe, Lithuania and Serbia had not registered for the meeting.



Welcome speech by Prof. Manuel Heitor, Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal

Prof. Manuel Heitor, Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal, welcomed everybody and underlined the importance of the BFUG and its role in implementing and enlarging the Bologna Process through recognizing, preserving and achieving diversity to align with the European values and guarantee education throughout the EHEA. He emphasized the importance of combining research, innovation and education to build a strong, active education paradigm. The way to do this is through skills' development. With the pandemic crisis, several actions needed to be taken. Most notably, the adoption of digital systems, articulation and combination of virtual learning with in-person meetings and increase of the quality of teaching and learning systems. Minister Heitor stated the importance of building closer relationships between society and higher education institutions (HEIs), through taking a student-centered approach, focusing on skills development, capacity-building processes and creating new framework programs (e.g. Erasmus). He encouraged everyone to suggest specific issues to be included in the European Council Resolution of May by Portugal.

1. Welcome and introduction to the meeting

1.1 Welcome by the BFUG Co-chairs (Portugal & Andorra) and Vice-chair (Albania)

Mr. Josep Areny, Director of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Andorra, thanked everyone for their work on the development of the draft Work Plan for the period 2021-2024. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is of great importance to approve the draft Work Plan promptly, to ensure the development of strategies that link to the fulfilment of the Rome Communiqué's commitments. He praised the academic cooperation between Andorra and Portugal and thanked the BFUG Secretariat for their operational support to the BFUG for the period ahead.

Mr. Jordi Llombart (BFUG Co-chair, Andorra) and Ms. Linda Pustina (BFUG Vice-chair, Albania) thanked everyone for their support. Ms. Linda Pustina thanked Italy for the excellent organization of the Rome Ministerial, Mr. Lantero and Ms. Isaacs for the support and smooth handover period, the European Commission and Council of Europe for their support and the Co-chairs for the excellent collaboration. She noted that by collaborating closely together, we will do our best to reach the goals ahead, involving and collaborating closely with academic communities and students within the EHEA and beyond, being more inclusive and open, sharing fundamental values and our good practices and helping each other on reaching the Bologna key commitments. She also shared her hope that in 2024, the Ministerial Conference and the Global Policy Forum can reunite all participants in presence in Tirana, to share achievements and objectives for the future.

2. Adoption of the agenda

During the discussion of the draft agenda, Mr. Peter Greisler (Outgoing BFUG Co-chair, Germany), proposed that the Expressions of Interest for the working structures be discussed on the first day in the event discussions are needed before a final decision is made on the second day. As many participants expressed support for the proposal, Ms. Ana Mateus (BFUG Co-chair, Portugal) proposed to include it as the last item of the first day's agenda. The agenda was formally adopted with the above-mentioned change.

For more detailed information on the Agenda, please see BFUG_PT_AD_76_2.1_Agenda; BFUG_PT_AD_76_2.2_Annotated_Agenda.



3. Feedback from the previous meeting

3.1 Update on the previous BFUG Board meeting, Andorra la Vella, February 2021

Mr. Jordi Llobart (BFUG Co-chair, Andorra) provided an update on the last Board meeting hosted by Andorra and held on 11 February 2021, online. He shared an overview of the agenda items discussed in the meeting, such as the BFUG Secretariat Terms of Reference (ToRs), draft Work Plan and Working Structures ToRs, Rules of Procedure for 2021-2014 and more.

In light of the Rome Communiqué, there were discussions in the Board meeting on whether to establish a new Working Group (WG) on Digitalization or keep it as part of the WG on Learning & Teaching (L&T). Two new Task Forces (TFs) on increasing synergy between EHEA and ERA and enhancing knowledge-sharing in the EHEA community were also discussed and subsequently a Call for Expression of Interest was shared with the BFUG to gauge the level of interest.

For more detailed information on the Board Meeting hosted by Andorra, please see: *BFUG_PT_AD_75_Minutes*.

4. Information by the current BFUG Secretariat

Ms. Enida Bezhani, Head of BFUG Secretariat, introduced the Secretariat team as a coming together of 9 colleagues, both mature experts with expertise in education and junior experts, who are keen to engage and establish themselves in education management. A cautious expansion based on the needs of the BFUG and its working structures will be undertaken.

A Call for Expression of Interest for the BFUG working structures was organized by the Secretariat and demonstrated remarkably high interest. In May, the Secretariat will reach out to all the BFUG members and consultative members to update the contacts database, as well as the EHEA website in terms of country representation and national information. Ms. Bezhani proposed that the BFUG consider posting online unofficial translations of the Rome Communiqué, as the backbone of this work period. The proposal was welcomed by the BFUG.

For more details on the mandate and current status of the BFUG Secretariat, please see: *BFUG_PT_AD_76_4.1_BFUG_Secretariat_ToRs_for_2021-2024*; *BFUG_PT_AD_76_4.2_BFUG_Secretariat_Update_Presentation*.

5. Presentation and discussion on the 2021-2024 Work Plan

5.1. Discussion on WGs and respective ToRs for final approval

The draft Work Plan for 2021-2024 was introduced and the discussions were mainly focused on the ToRs for the WG on L&T and the two proposed TFs. In addition to feedback provided by the BFUG members and consultative members ahead of the meeting, some of the other points raised and proposed by the BFUG included:

- Incorporate the following reference from the Rome Communiqué, which integrates digitalization into the WG on L&T: "We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in using digital technologies for learning, teaching and assessment, as well as for academic communication and research, and to investing in the development of digital skills and competences for all";



- Better communication, knowledge-sharing and dissemination of good practices through the relevant TF, will help put communication and cooperation on the permanent BFUG agenda;
- Digitalization is a cross-cutting issue that goes beyond L&T and it is referenced extensively in the Rome Communiqué. The ToRs of the WG on L&T do not cover to the full extent the subject matter, therefore, it would be beneficial to revisit the idea of establishing this new WG and respective ToRs;
- Digitalization is such an integral part of L&T, that it would be artificial to try and separate it. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of both digitalization and face-to-face interaction in L&T, therefore, it is important to maintain a balance. The very detailed process outlined under the Purpose and Outcome section of the WG on L&T, seems to anticipate what could be the outcome of the group, rather than what should be the input to the group, as to what it should do, therefore, keeping it concise: "Fostering innovative learning and teaching." is advised;
- The Rome Communiqué provides a precise mandate of the interoperability of the digital systems and that would require a different type of expertise from the one present in the current WG on L&T;
- The issue on the well-being of students in light of the pandemic, could be best discussed in the WG on Social Dimension (SD), rather than the WG on L&T;
- The WG on L&T could establish substructures with relevant experts on the various topics that can feed into the bigger group. Regarding the survey to be organized under this WG, clarity is needed on what is the expected outcome;
- As per the Rome Communiqué, for quality teaching, it is not sufficient to have only efficient institutions and highly motivated students, but also well-supported teachers. Therefore, the elaboration of a strategy to support teachers should be included in the ToRs;
- If there are aspects of digitalization that cannot be incorporated into the WG on L&T, it may be a good idea to have a TF on the interoperability of digital protocols. It should be left to the WG to decide how to address more specific issues, given that its scope is quite comprehensive;
- The survey anticipated under the WG on L&T, could link to indicators developed to monitor progress on L&T and it should serve a purpose;
- Under the Specific Tasks section of the WG on Global Policy Dialogue (GPD), the wording be amended in line with its scope: "Suggest plans to the BFUG for the organization of the Global Policy Forum...";
- EQAR has launched a dialogue on interoperability with several other European organizations/initiatives, as part of the DEQAR CONNECT project, and it would be willing to provide ad-hoc feedback on this to any of the BFUG structures.

There was also a call to the BFUG members and consultative members to join the EUROSTUDENT project 8, which is focused on the social dimension in Europe and enables comparison of the situation in the various European countries in this regard.

In conclusion, the updated Work Plan was approved after amendments to the ToRs for L&T were reflected, which included: a. reference to the Rome Communiqué on support to digital technology; b. elaborated wording on: "supporting the members of the EHEA in developing successful ways to improve strategies for the enhancement of learning and teaching; c. rearranging the priorities under the WG on L&T, to ensure balance, in the following order: 1. making student-centered learning a reality across the entire EHEA; 2. supporting staff development; d. concise wording: "fostering innovative ...and teaching". Proposed amended wording under GPD was approved as well. It was decided to keep digitalization within the WG on L&T and adding more specialized subgroups/experts to tackle the topics that are not yet included in the ToRs for the WG on L&T. (The updated version of the document is attached.)

5.2. Discussion on TFs and respective ToRs for final approval

The introduction of the new TFs generated a discussion on the best way to tackle the topics proposed by the TFs.

The BFUG made the following main observations:

- More BFUG working structures may affect efficiency and require more resources to follow up. The communication between EHEA and ERA can be tackled by the Co-chairs or those members who sit on both fora;
- TFs are needed to establish better communication between organizations, such as ERA, as scientists, and the BFUG, as policy-makers;
- The 2 TF will focus on issues which have not been successfully tackled yet;
- Many people do not realize what the BFUG is doing to make cooperation more fruitful and more open for all the groups and academic communities. Therefore, the TFs are strongly supported and after one year they should report to the BFUG to demonstrate progress;
- The TF on synergies may play an important role in giving a stronger voice to the non-EU BFUG members;
- Given how frequently synergies among EHEA, EEA and ERA come up, within the proposed short-term until December 2020, the TF could present the BFUG with a proposal on how the synergies can happen most efficiently, identify what types of meetings are needed and what could be their objectives and outcomes – without creating an additional layer;
- As ERA is establishing a WG on the Bonn Declaration and monitoring indicators of measuring scientific freedom, it should be assessed whether the respective TF or the WG on FV will deal with it. It should also be decided who will deal with the monitoring systems developed within ERA on Fundamental Values. The goal is not to have overlapping WGs on FV;
- The WGs on L&T and Fundamental Values (FV) should be in contact with ERA when they discuss topics such as academic freedom;
- No long-term vision and no strategy or policy should be developed without the involvement and consultation of those that actually have to implement and achieve it – students and faculties members. We need to ensure that the reforms promoted within the BFUG are relevant for the academic community and the society at large. To achieve this is mandatory to involve and encourage the education community to work closely with stakeholders, and communicate more effectively with them, as well as share knowledge transnationally, nationally - horizontally and vertically - and even within the same institution;
- Some of the proposed tasks for the TF on communication seem to be similar to some tasks directly addressed by the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs). Knowledge-sharing should be integrated into the various WGs. This TF could be a technical support group for the BFUG Secretariat and it could engage communication specialists from the various HE Ministries. As currently envisaged, it may create an artificial separation from the WGs, BFUG, and Secretariat;
- The TF on knowledge sharing would not interfere with working groups' work. It aims to address some of the gaps between academia and the policy-making level;
- The TF on knowledge-sharing is expected to draft plans that will be shared regularly with the BFUG and find effective ways to share knowledge to educate the audiences on the Bologna Process. The interest received for participation during the call, demonstrates enthusiasm for the TFs;
- Knowledge-sharing happens at various national levels and is performed by various consultative members in diverse ways, however, the respective TF may be yet another opportunity for knowledge and experience-sharing.



Mrs. Ana Mateus (BFUG Co-chair, Portugal) explained that the aim is to establish small TFs to address topics that have been a challenge for the BFUG. The aim is to have the WGs and TFs cooperate and look at issues from different angles.

In conclusion, consensus was reached on establishing the TFs, but their ToRs may need some revision. The Co-chairs and members who had shown interest in the TFs through the Call were approved, and the expression of further interest for membership is open until April 30, 2021. The TFs, as composed, will revise the ToRs and the Co-chairs will send them to the BFUG, including the proposal of the duration for consultation and approval by electronic procedure.

For more details on the draft Work Plan and ToRs, please see: BFUG_PT_AD_76_5_Draft_Work_Plan_and_TORs_Annex_I (updated document).

6. Presentation and discussion on the Rules of Procedure for 2021-2024

The Rules of Procedure for 2021-2024 were presented for discussion and approval. It was noted that as the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) coordinates the work of the TPGs toward the BFUG and Board, the work of the TPGs is represented through the BICG Co-Chair attending the Board. Therefore, it would not be coherent to include the TPGs' Co-chairs as additional Board members.

The contribution and representation of the WGs' Co-chairs in the Board meetings is a very important step, as it ensures that the work done in the various WGs, is brought directly to the Board, which in turn prepares the BFUG meeting. It makes little sense to limit the speaking rights of their Co-chairs. By contributing to the Board, they will see themselves as part of the whole, rather than a WG, only with a limited scope and in turn, the Board needs the contribution of the Co-chairs. This proposal was further supported with the rationale that it is very useful for the participants in the Board meeting to have the freedom and ability to speak, as the Board is a 'sounding platform' for what will be brought to the BFUG meeting or what points may come up.

It was suggested that the equal treatment principle, as per Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué and the BFUG meeting in Stockholm, 2009, be reflected in the Rules of Procedures, with regard to the host of the Board meeting (EU or non-EU Co-chair). It should be up to the Co-chairs to decide how to divide their responsibilities.

Following the earlier confirmation of the two TFs, the discussions elaborated on whether they should be represented by another structure/group or report directly by self-representation to the Board and BFUG. In the previous work period, the TF on Fundamental Values reported to the

Board, however, that was a different setting, as its Co-chairs were also the Co-chairs of the WG on Monitoring and Implementation (M&I).

In conclusion, the updated version of the Rules of Procedures was approved, upon reflection of the proposed changes entailing, inclusion of the Co-chairs of the TFs as members of the Board; representation of the TPGs through the BICG in the Board; removal of the reference concerning the manner of contribution of the WGs' Co-chairs in the Board meeting and application of the fairness principle with regard to the hosting of Board meetings. (The updated document is found attached).

7. Feedback on the Rome Ministerial Conference: Key messages and challenges ahead from the Report on the Rome Ministerial Communiqué



On behalf of the Outgoing Italian BFUG Secretariat, Ms. Vera Lucke delivered a comprehensive presentation of the work carried out by the Secretariat for the 2018-2020 work period. She gave an overview of the work done and challenges that the Italian Secretariat had to overcome during the Covid-19 pandemic. A comprehensive overview of the organization of the Rome Ministerial Conference was also presented. She thanked all the members, consultative members, partners and Co-chairs of the various semesters, for their valuable help and support.

Mr. Michael Watney (Outgoing Co-chair, UK/Scotland) thanked first the Italian Secretariat for organizing an excellent conference under incredibly difficult circumstances. He further went on to give feedback on the Rome Ministerial Communiqué. There has been a recognition of the important role HE has to play in national efforts to be built on from the pandemic. The idea of supporting HE systems to find solutions to pressing problems is carried forward to other areas including, digitalization, sustainable developments and new forms of learning mobility and cooperation across the EHEA and given the importance of the latter the work of BFUG should focus on it. The need to promote and protect the EHEA shared fundamental values, as the necessary basis for quality learning teaching and research, as well as for democratic societies in general, was also highlighted. This is reflected in the work undertaken on the FV within the BFUG and confirmation by many ministers of the UK/DE statement on Belarus at the Rome Ministerial Conference. The peer support approach has also been strongly supported and appreciated and this should be taken forward.

8. Overview of the Expressions of Interest for the working structures

Ms. Enida Bezhani (Head of BFUG Secretariat) presented an overview of the expression of interest, stating that 53 applications were submitted for the WGs and 21 for the TFs. It was pointed out that no Call for Expression of Interest was put out for the BICG as its composition was agreed in the Berlin meeting.

Following the presentation, the following observations were made:

- It is very positive to see such an interest in the working structures. One more Co-chair is needed for the WG on M&I;
- The International Association of Universities (IAU) would make a substantial contribution to the WG on Global Policy Dialogue (GPD), as one of the very few international organizations, which can act as BFUG's counterpart in various parts of the world;
- A deadline should be set for accepting additional interest for the TFs and non-EU countries are encouraged to apply;
- It is very important to have a strong connection between the WGs on M&I and FV, especially if indicators are to be developed for measuring FV.

The ToRs state that each WG should be co-chaired by at least one BFUG member and this should be the case for the WG on L&T, which France, Ireland, and EURASHE have expressed an interest in co-chairing. The Co-chairs proposed by France and Ireland are not part of the BFUG. Two pragmatic alternatives were proposed by the BFUG. The first was for either France or Ireland to add the proposed Co-chairs to their country's delegations, to ensure close contact between the WGs and BFUG. The second alternative was to have one of the Co-chairs of the WG on L&T be invited to the BFUG meetings. On pragmatic grounds and to ensure parity of delegations, both France and Ireland supported alternative 2, as the preferred solution.

Another proposed pragmatic solution was to add one more Co-chair from the BFUG to the WG on L&T, given the important tasks this WG will address. Given its previous contribution to the WG on



L&T and the importance of student-centered learning for the Holy See, it would be willing to help with the solution, as the Holy See is present in this WG with a BFUG delegate.

As per the matter of four expressions of interest received for the co-chairing of two WGs, it was shared that in the past, there have been situations in which there were four Co-chairs and it worked well. It was suggested that work starts in the groups and they can discuss the division of the work internally. However, the final decision is made by the BFUG, if there are changes to the current state.

In conclusion, the membership of the WGs was approved as per the expressions of interest received, with Norway agreeing to co-chair two WGs. It was proposed and agreed that more time be given for expression of interest to the TFs. There was also an agreement to invite the IAU as a technical expert in the WG on GPD in the future, as foreseen in the ToR.

For more details on the BFUG working structures, please see BFUG_PT_AD_76_Working Structures_Expression_of_Interest_Presentation. (The updated document is found attached).

9. Implications/Impact of Covid-19 in the HEIs Quality Assurance, innovative pedagogies and assessment from academics and students' perspective

A number of consultative members shared their views on the implications of Covid-19 in the HEIs.

9.1. Perspectives from ENQA and EQAR on Quality Assurance (QA) in digital education

ENQA shared that concerning e-Learning, QA has been part of the agenda, even before the Covid-19 crisis, therefore, all that applies to traditional face-to-face learning also applies to e-learning. This includes the ESG, which can also be applied and used for all types of delivery modes. It should be noted that a part of the national indicators and criteria may not be directly usable for e-Learning, as they could provide a distorted picture of QA, when directly applied to e-learning. Academic staff development, curriculum/program design, assessment methods, student support criteria and engagement need to be considered as well in assessing the quality of e-learning. Due to the pandemic, e-Learning programs were created, but these programs need to be identified as "emergency solutions" rather than actual, proper e-Learning programs. ENQA aim is to create ways of addressing the QA of programs that will remain online beyond the emergency.

EQAR reported on the challenges of the pandemic situation, adding that it is important not to overburden QAAs and HEIs. Except for the requirements of "site visits", all other aspects were compatible with online learning. However, adaptation is required and its extent will be determined

by the current system requirements. Currently, there is no need for additional/new normative documents to the ESG. There was a decline in the number of reviews by registered agencies overall, particularly during the first months of the pandemic, as many reviews were postponed. Regardless, there is no need for general quality concern, although it may take time to reach a final conclusion. In terms of the perspective of students and staff, there is concern regarding the negative consequences of online teaching, especially with regard to the quality of teaching and students' welfare. A slowdown is unfortunately observed in the legislative changes. There has been no major progress in 2020 in enabling cross-border QA or the European approach, as policy-makers were busy with other matters. The European University initiatives are, however, working very actively to develop their cooperation and offer many new joint programs. The lack of progress in cross-border recognition, though, does risk inhibiting that.



9.2. Academic and students' perspective on innovative pedagogies and assessment by EUA, EURASHE, ETUCE and ESU

According to EUA, the Covid-19 crisis pushed institutions to act faster, adjust their operations accordingly, and enable faster decision-making. The situation created challenges in finding a balance between the quality of education and safety and security demands. However, the situation has also created an opportunity for institutions, to reflect on their missions, structures and level of preparation. Institutions need to adopt digitally enhanced L&T in the event of future crises. Challenges have gone beyond the lack of technological infrastructure, including social interaction, importance of peer-to-peer support, as well as social aspects. Future digital innovation is fundamental in L&T and institutions need to encourage hybrid learning, as a complementary part of the teaching programs, as well as a way of achieving sustainability, inclusion and European and international collaboration. Currently, there is no sufficient information to assess the impact of dropout rates, quality, employment and other aspects from a European perspective.

EURASHE pointed out that the crisis had affected research significantly, leading to inconclusive results in the short term. Face-to-face and distance/online learning are to be seen as complementary, at least in HE. Although hybrid education may be difficult, it is here to stay. For blended learning to prove effective, QA systems need to be very operative. Greater concern lies in the impact on research, as the time spent supporting students has made it more difficult to conduct research. Wherever lockdown measures have been very strict, some HEIs have been unable to deliver all courses planned, purely for lack of know-how. The issue lies mainly in the need for more robust capacity-building programs. The crisis can be seen as a form of "exercise," when it comes to providing learning for students, including those with a physical disability or learning issues, by using equipment and resources, and acting and reacting creatively to provide ways of reasserting the importance of scientific integrity within a democratic approach.

ETUCE reported on the research conducted with the national education trade unions on the impact of the pandemic, with the main focus on the academic staff. When it comes to the transition to distance and/or online education, HE teachers and researchers have been efficient in switching to new teaching methods and making the most of the technology. Teaching staff needs permanent job security, reliable career paths and quality continuous professional development. Digital teaching resulted in a heavier workload for teachers, who had difficulties in balancing remote working with home-schooling of their children and had to reduce the time for research activities. There is great concern that jobs and/or hours will be cut due to income shortfalls, resulting from loss of revenue from the international students. It is important to find a balance between open access and protection of intellectual property rights for academics. As HER institutions claim ownership over the teaching materials and research data, the union members are concerned about losing their rights on their own research outcomes when moving to another institution. A

guarantee of public investments in education is needed, through the improvement of the IT infrastructure, efficient learning materials and promotion of open education resources. As online L&T will remain relevant and hybrid learning will become the "new normal," HEIs need to focus on teachers' support, to guarantee a qualified and motivated staff.

For more detailed information, please see: [BFUG_PT_AD_76_11.1_ETUCE_Report_on_Covid_impact_on_HER_staff](#).

ESU provided an overview on the assessment of the short and medium-term impact of Covid-19 on HE, which could result in devastating consequences for HE, including: major financial cuts from the public sector, major tuition fee losses and negative outcomes for underrepresented,



vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups. However, the pandemic has also provided an opportunity to reflect on how HEIs are organized and to formulate creative solutions and alternative possibilities for the future. Through the adoption of innovative approaches and well-organized online learning systems, acceleration of HE transformation and improvement of the learning process can be achieved. In the short term, the following findings are suggested for adoption: a. provision of professional training, counselling and guidance; b. training and capability building; c. sustainable means to finance studies (prolonging instalment plans, cancelling tuition fees); d. digitalization of procedures i.e. recognition process. ESU encouraged policy-makers to understand better the emerging trends and challenges and identify policy responses to address these challenges.

An article on the higher education response to Covid-19 by the Council of Europe, the IAU, and other contributors can also be found at <https://ehea.info/page-BFUG-meeting-76>.

10. Belarus Implementation Report

Ann Katherine Isaacs, (Italy) shared an overview of the Implementation Report for Belarus. A report had already been presented and discussed in the BFUG Board meeting in Edinburgh and in the BFUG meeting in Berlin. It indicated that the process of implementation had been significantly slower than planned, but progress had been made, nevertheless. The main conclusion reached at that time was that the case of Belarus seemed to confirm very strongly the validity of the peer support method and the importance of direct interaction between Belarus and delegates from the other EHEA countries.

Ms. Isaacs noted that according to an update shared by the Belarus delegates with her on the developments of the last four months and the Action Plan for 2021, quite complex new regulations on credits had been drafted and are under discussion. HEIs are to revise their study programs using the concept of learning outcomes. Steps toward the certification of the NQF have continued. Autonomy in curriculum design has increased and there is a new draft code on education. She emphasized that EHEA has the duty of both highlighting and combating things that are against the EHEA values, but also being supportive.

Several delegations observed that there appears to be a disconnect between the information reported in the meeting and the wider context of the events taking place in Belarus. Serious issues exist, particularly concerning upholding academic freedom and fundamental values. A statement on Belarus was drafted and put forward in the Rome Ministerial Conference.

The German Academic Exchange Service has just launched a program for students at risk in whatever country, including Belarus. More information can be found at,

[DAAD scholarship "Hilde Domin Programme" for students and doctoral candidates at risk \(eua.eu\).](https://www.eua.eu/en/daad-scholarship-hilde-domin-programme-for-students-and-doctoral-candidates-at-risk)

Also, Norway and Romania have launched special scholarship schemes for students from Belarus. More information on the Romanian scheme can be found at: [100 pentru Belarus | 100 for Belarus | Ministerul Educatiei.](https://www.mec.ro/ro/100-pentru-belarus-100-for-belarus-ministerul-educatiei)

On the structural reforms, there are relatively good systems for assessing progress, but monitoring should not be reduced to that. An independent QA agency is an important structural reform and Belarus is not quite there yet, however, quality culture cannot be fostered in a situation where the fundamental values of HE are not respected. EHEA would not be credible if these issues were not addressed, therefore, both the BICG and the WG on M&I should play a role and the Board should continue to follow up developments in this regard. There needs to be reporting also on the other aspects of the Belarus Roadmap.



Belarus observed that the structural reforms are underlined by the fundamental values and academic freedoms, therefore, progressing the structural reforms could be a way to move forward with the values and freedoms. It took pride in revising the Education Code, which is currently with the Belarusian parliament for discussion. Belarus proposed to present an overall report on the Strategic Work Plan Implementation, with a section on the Fundamental Values, in the next BFUG Board meeting. It kindly asked the BFUG to allow Belarus to move at its own pace and be equally treated like other countries and, therefore, not be a specific part of the agenda, while participating actively in the peer support groups and other WGs.

ESU noted that students, who choose to advocate for democracy in Belarus, are facing repression and are expelled because they were out on the streets participating peacefully in protests for democracy. It is becoming difficult to monitor the situation, gain information on students' imprisonment, monitor the process on the education codes, and more. ESU thanked countries like Romania, Germany, Norway and others for providing scholarship opportunities and supporting students.

Belarus noted that it had conducted a survey on students' expulsion and shared that the reasons for expulsion are linked to failure in academic performance, financial reasons and personal reasons. The ministry has no reports of illegal reasons for expulsion.

The BFUG needs to continue to look also after those in the academic community, who are trying to steer the future of Belarus in a different direction. It would strengthen the credibility of Belarus to admit that there are issues with students and staff, who cannot pursue their studies and research freely. The BFUG is supportive and stands by to advise and bring expertise to Belarus, however, it would clearly point out things that do not work.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the BFUG keeps monitoring with a holistic view, while the Board monitors closely and asks for a closer reporting by December 2023, before the Ministerial Conference. BFUG will continue to ask for intensive reporting not only on the structural reforms, but also on the fundamental values.

11. Updates from the consultative members

EURASHE informed the BFUG about an upcoming new delegation to be made for its organization: Michael Karpíšek initially shared information on the EURASHE's May conference hosted by Portugal. Further, he announced that his mandate as the Secretary-General of EURASHE was coming to an end in May, therefore, he took the opportunity to commend the BFUG for its work and acknowledge the BFUG colleagues. After that, Stéphane Lauwick, the President of EURASHE

announced as well that his third mandate would come to an end in May. He shared EURASHE's "huge appreciation of the work Michael has done with and for EURASHE and within the BFUG and his enormous work capacity". The meeting participants acknowledged the great contribution of Mr. Karpíšek and Mr. Lauwick to the BFUG and wished them all the best.

CoE, EUA, EURASHE, UNESCO and EUROSTUDENT had provided updates of their work prior to the meeting and remained open for questions. ENQA, ESU, and EQAR will send written reports for the next meeting in the interest of time.

12. Information by the Incoming Co-chairs



Mrs. Gayane Harutyunyan (Incoming Co-chair, Armenia) informed that the next BFUG Board meeting will be hosted online by Armenia on October 21, 2021. However, should the vaccination prove effective, Armenia will be happy to host the meeting in presence. The agenda will be based on the outcomes of the current meeting, as well as meetings of the working structures.

Mrs. Duša Marjetić, (Incoming Co-chair, Slovenia) congratulated the Portuguese chair of the BFUG meeting on the effectiveness of the chairing. Slovenia is looking forward to hosting the BFUG meeting, as the initial reports will be incoming by the BFUG working structures by that time. While it has been announced that Slovenia is planning an online meeting due to the Covid-19 situation, it is willing to leave an open opportunity for a live event. Since April 15, 2021, the Slovenian government has put in motion a vaccination plan for all the graduates of the secondary school, so that their graduation exams can go smoothly and enrolment in HEIs be smooth.

13. AoB

France updated the participants with a save-the-date information: under the French presidency, next year, the BFUG meeting will take place on April 11-12, 2022, at the Council of Europe premises in Strasbourg. The 11th of April will coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Mrs. Kristina Hauschildt (EUROSTUDENT) invited all the BFUG members to join the next round of the EUROSTUDENT project, starting in summer 2021, with data collection in spring/summer 2022. EUROSTUDENT has been collecting data on the social and economic conditions for several decades now and this way generating information that is not available elsewhere, but which has very high relevance also in view of the social dimension of higher education.

For more details, please see *BFUG_PT_AD_76_13.10_EUROSTUDENT_Update*.

Mrs. Klara Engels-Perenyi (European Commission delegation) updated the BFUG on the upcoming call for supporting EHEA, expected to be launched likely at the end of June 2021. For the current work plan, €5 million have been secured and this will be a call that would last until the 2024 Ministerial Conference. There are currently 26-27 projects running from the previous work period and many of them have contributed to policy development. The deadline for application is expected to be the end of September 2021. The call will allow support to the TPGs for their meeting organizations and projects that follow up on commitments to the Rome Communiqué. Mrs. Engels-Perenyi thanked the Co-chairs for the very good and efficient chairing and congratulated the Secretariat for mastering this first meeting, which is the most difficult, perfectly.

She further thanked the Italian BFUG Secretariat for the Rome Ministerial Conference, as well as Mr. Karpíšek and Mr. Lauwick from EURASHE for their contribution to the BFUG.

The Portuguese Co-chairs wrapped up the meeting by providing a summary of the main discussions and conclusions. They thanked the BFUG for the meeting and the Secretariat for all the technical and hard work.