



Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union



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



May Montenegro live forever

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BFUG BOARD MEETING

Podgorica (Montenegro), 24th October 2016

Minutes

Delegation	First Name	Surname
BFUG Co-chair (Slovakia)	Jozef	Jurkovič
BFUG (Slovakia)	Andrej	Piovarči
BFUG Co-chair (Montenegro)	Biljana	Misovic
BFUG (Montenegro)	Slobodan	Filipović
BFUG (Montenegro)	Aleksandar	Vujović
BFUG incoming Co-chair (Malta)	Tanya	Sammut Bonnici
BFUG incoming Co-chair (Norway)	Toril	Johansson
BFUG Vice-chair (France)	Patricia	Pol
European Commission	Mette-Moerk	Andersen
Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
ESU	Lea	Meister (excused)
EUA	Michael	Gaebel
EURASHE	Michal	Karpisek
AG2 chair (Germany)	Frank	Petrikowski
AG3 chair (Liechtenstein)	Daniel	Miescher
AG4 chair (Romania)	Mihai Cezar	Haj
WG1 chair (Norway)	Tone Flood	Strøm
WG2 chair (Belgium fl.)	Noël	Vercruysse
WG3 chair (Russia)	Nadezda	Kamyninan
BFUG Secretariat	Françoise	Profit
BFUG Secretariat	Marina	Steinmann

1. Welcome and introduction to the meeting

The Co-chair from Montenegro welcomed the participants. She reminded them that this year Montenegro is celebrating ten years of independence. Therefore, the country is trying to be very active in the BFUG. In his welcome speech, State Secretary Slobodan Filipović from the Ministry of Education explained that the Bologna Process was revolutionary in many ways and especially mentioned the connection of Higher Education with the labour market and the European knowledge society. In 2004, Montenegro has harmonised all programmes with Bologna standards. He stressed that the country changed the ways of collecting data and financing higher education. Students are active partners in higher education policy making, national legislation is in line with EU regulations and further development of education and culture will take place till becoming member of the European Union.

The Co-chair from Slovakia thanked Montenegro for hosting the meeting.

The Vice-chair from France also thanked for hosting the BFUG Board meeting and the former Co-chairs from the Netherlands and Moldova for their work. She pointed out that the BFUG has reached the mid-term of the 2015-2018 period and that the meetings in the actual and the next semester are crucial.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted. A letter from EAIE will be discussed at AOB.

3. Minutes of the last meetings

The minutes of the BFUG Board meeting in Chisinau were adopted. At the request of the Council of Europe and exceptionally, on page 11 a footnote will be inserted referring to later BFUG discussions due to which the Bratislava BFUG meeting will discuss academic freedom and fundamental values.

The Board took note of the minutes from the BFUG meeting in Amsterdam, 7/8th March 2016.

4. Adopted proceedings: Table Presidency and refined wording for the adoption of the minutes (l.c/d)

The Board took note of the refined wording which explicitly states that rules for the adoption of minutes do not only apply to the BFUG and the Board but to all its sub-groups as well.

Considering recent political developments in the United Kingdom, the proposed update of the table with Co-chairs of the BFUG is logic. The Chairs of the BFUG will send a message to the UK representatives to inform them about the suggested adoption during the BFUG meeting in Bratislava.

In addition it was requested, that the composition of the drafting committee (p. 4 of the proceedings) should be amended with the names of the countries chairing in spring 2017, autumn 2017 and spring 2018 as members of this body.

5. Fundamental values of the EHEA

Referring to his co-authors, Sjur Bergan introduced the background paper and explained that the Board should prepare thematic sessions for Bratislava and not necessarily have the thematic discussion in the Board. Key aspects of the paper are academic freedom and institutional autonomy. They may be developed together, but in some cases one of them is emphasised but the other one not / not to the same extent, and one can even imagine situations in which institutional autonomy exists without academic freedom. Academic freedom is difficult in a society where freedom of expression is limited. Unlike freedom of expression, academic freedom needs to take account of the standards of the discipline. Some countries have greater challenges than others but the issue is real for all.

Institutional autonomy might be (mis)understood as absence of public authority. An interesting question is, how public authorities can further academic freedom and institutional autonomy (e.g. through legislation, quality assurance ...).

The Board members thanked the authors for the excellent document on this very important topic.

Some participants proposed

- including the element of transparency, especially transparency of reporting in the institution,
- discussing the potential tension between institutional autonomy and the role of ministries/public authorities
- looking at the role of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in enhancing the quality of higher education and research,
- looking at other values in addition to autonomy and academic freedom.

The EUA representative recommended its autonomy scorecard as one approach for the session which would allow referring to quality instead of democracy. Case studies in addition to the scorecard would be good. The Commission supports the EUA request to have a separate discussion paper and background information including the autonomy scoreboard and the prepared note on institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

A discussion on indicators is necessary. Discussing the principles does not necessarily allow for measuring. For WG1, reporting on fundamental values is very challenging. The indicator probably would be based on the EUA autonomy scoreboard, Council of Europe Recommendation on public responsibility for higher education, the results of the discussions at the thematic session at the BFUG meeting, consultation with relevant organisations such as the Magna Charta Universitatum and ESU data on student participation in governance.

Different hypotheses and questions have been presented, e.g. that autonomy is only successful if it enables excellence, but does one equal the other? Who defines what excellence is? Quality might have to be regarded in a broader sense than just excellence. Is the system delivering what the society needs?

Shared values have been addressed in the Yerevan Communiqué and the Bologna Declaration, but so far, values have not been discussed very much in the Bologna process. It would be good to have two or three external speakers in Bratislava or to involve them in the parallel sessions. Other values need to follow institutional autonomy and academic freedom; the discussion should be continued during the next semester with other aspects of fundamental values.

The Council of Europe and the Vice-chair promised to – after discussion with the co-authors – incorporate some elements which were raised in a discussion document for Bratislava. The debate at the BFUG should start with a short question paper from the BFUG Co-chairs and the presented paper as a background document.

What is the aim for 2018: a special document, a paragraph in the Communiqué, a special session ...?

After short discussion, the Board agreed that the outcome of BFUG discussion(s) should be conclusions/recommendations for the Ministerial conference 2018. How can these fundamental values really be vitalised (not only saying it)? How should the discussion at the ministerial conference look like?

6. Update concerning the AG/WG work

The chair of WG1 reported that the preparation for the 2018 Implementation Report is proceeding smoothly. The inclusion of data from other sources had been agreed upon by the BFUG. The new report will have to make sure that the priorities of the Yerevan Communiqué are well addressed, that coherence with earlier implementation reports is maintained and that the length of the report does not exceed the 2015 edition. A large number of new indicators (e.g. academic freedom and institutional autonomy, academic staff, short cycle, degree structure, QA & ESG, recognition and disadvantaged students) have been proposed. A few of the old indicators will be removed, others will be updated. As agreed upon in the BFUG, a proposal for the structure of the 2018 report was developed and sent to the BFUG for comments. Comments were received from six countries. The main points agreed upon by the WG were to include a section on fees and student support, data on credit mobility and migrant students, on automatic recognition, on the share of men/women completing higher education, on national strategies for widening access as well as data on the use of the Diploma Supplement by employers as well as the relevance of mobility experiences for employability. Eurydice is developing the data collection tools; while ESU and EUA data will be the main sources for information on teaching practices. New indicators will be tested within the WG. The European approach to QA of joint programmes will also be included and EQAR will be consulted. Country sheets will be provided in the appendix.

Countries will receive prefilled excel sheets with BFUG members asked to approve the information or change it with explanations. This is in order to ease the burden of data collection among BFUG members. Questionnaires will be sent by the end of January 2017. The BFUG has to adopt the structure of the report, but not the details.

Comments of the Board members asked to provide the deadline for country answers. The EUA representative informed that another report (not called "Trends") might be available in autumn 2017. The question of publishing data on non-implementation is discussed separately (cf. below/AG3). Additional proposals were to look at the minimum number of ECTS credits for first and second cycle, at the duration/number of credits for part-time studies and the short cycle in relation with how people progress between cycles (are short cycles primarily used for professional qualification or as part of further higher education).

The chair of WG2 reported of discussions about the proposal of non-implementation from AG3 and some documents from WG1. A concept note on reversed peer review is drafted. The template for events had been modified and shared with WG3. Thematic sessions on short cycle and social dimension did take place at the second meeting. WG2 is waiting for the results of the template/questionnaire to see if there has been any progress in aligning events to implementation issues.

WG3 has held two meetings and one WG chair meeting in between. The first meeting with a World Café identified the fields of interest. Some topics have been identified as specific focuses for the meetings (digital education, teacher support, EHEA:ERA, new learners, relevance of competences). The social dimension for migrants and active citizenship are situated in between these topics; active citizenship has been chosen as additional topic. The draft conclusions of the second meeting ("New Learners") included the recommendations of institutions becoming learning institutions, creating a virtual Erasmus, allowing for micro qualifications, accommodating people to study in their own pace, rewarding good teaching, creating more flexibility in degree systems, defining targets for investments in HE (% of GDP) and targets for students from families where parents have not studied.

Next week, the third meeting will deal with digital education and relevance of competences (one topic for each day), two speakers are invited. Communication with/within the WG has not always been that prompt because two chairs changed. Overlapping with other working groups is constantly discussed.

The Vice-chair explained that AG1 is open to external members which really participate actively. The next meeting will take place in Madrid in January 2017. The BPF concept note is a separate point on the agenda.

AG2 is following the table produced for the Belarus roadmap. Some critical aspects are the discussions in Belarus on the qualification framework that seems rather an occupational qualification framework not using the generic descriptors (Dublin Descriptors). The draft Education Code foresees a quality assurance agency within the ministry. ECTS is claimed to be implemented, yet using contact hours instead of learning outcomes. The new Education Code foresees the introduction of four-year Bachelor programmes and two-year Master programmes in line with Bologna.

The next meeting will take place in Berlin at the end of January/beginning of February. Rectors of Belarusian universities will be invited for a peer learning activity with German colleagues from the Technical University and the Humboldt University Berlin. A German-Russian parliamentary group meeting might be combined with that event. A draft report on the implementation of the roadmap will be presented to the BFUG in the beginning of 2018.

Board members stated that activities are valuable, but consequences for ministry/laws not really visible. Written proofs of certain regulations are missing. The BFUG with this group is for the first time focusing on full implementation within one country. From this work conclusions could be drawn for other activities related to non-implementation in all countries.

AG3 so far has held two meetings; the first to develop and describe key commitments, the second to develop and describe procedure models and body. First papers were adopted in Amsterdam, the new ones will be discussed in Bratislava. Key commitments have to be measured by WG1, there is a good exchange on how to do this best. For the new paper on the procedure, the cyclic model was chosen (the human resources model was copied in order to support members to meet expectations). The aim of the whole procedure is not to exclude any country (this might be regarded as a disadvantage). The number of repetitions of the cycle nevertheless might be limited.

A separate chapter (e.g. "non-implementation of key commitments") of the 2018 implementation report (IR) showing all indicators for the three key commitments for all countries is proposed. Questions for the BFUG in Bratislava will be: Format of the non-implementation report, acceptance of model, composition of the body.

The next meeting will take place in Zurich in January.

The Board members discussed advantages of (non)integration in the IR. Readers might think that the three key commitments are the most important aims of the Bologna process, but this is not the case, they have been chosen for technical reasons. A lack of the IR in its existing form is that it gives no picture of where a country stands. The IR should give the whole picture. The fact that the EHEA is dealing with non-implementation will determine how the EHEA is perceived in the rest of the world. The value of the EHEA depends on the way it deals with problems. WG1 is not in favour of integrating non-implementation in the IR because it would duplicate some information and favours a separate report. WG1 chairs will debate and see if they want to report something back to the BFUG in Bratislava. The Commission supported the WG1 proposal to have a stand-alone report on the issue.

In addition, it has to be decided what will be done until 2018, when the proposed procedure could start for the first time. Board members add that it will be crucial to identify a limited number of countries with serious problems in order to make sure that the number of cases can be handled. 15-16 countries might be concerned on the basis of the data from the 2015 IR, but it is hoped it will be less with the new data.

Some Board members suggested that the BFUG should not totally exclude exclusion. AG3 does not want to exclude the possibility of exclusion, but highlights that it will never be an automatic exclusion. Exclusion should be independent of the key commitments because there could be other reasons for such a decision.

The Vice-chair announced that enough time will be set aside to discuss all aspects of the proposal in Bratislava.

AG 4 is currently identifying new dimensions like internationalisation to be included in the Diploma Supplement. A first draft of the proposed changes will be presented with the written report for the BFUG meeting. Other issues, e.g. the doctoral supplement remain to be tackled later. The next meetings will take place in Vienna (next week), Brussels and Tirana.

The Vice-chair shortly informed the Board members that during the meeting of the AG/WG chairs' meeting in Berlin, round tables and co-ordination sessions between groups took place. Some groups (in particular WG2 and WG3) have been reminded that as suggested in their Terms of Reference it is important to as much as possible involve stakeholders and not only the groups' members. As it has been decided to have such a meeting once a year, the meeting in autumn 2017 will have to cater for proposals for the Ministerial conference. The BFUG should discuss, if an additional meeting of all AG/WG chairs during the first semester 2017 would be helpful.

7. Draft concept note for the Bologna Policy Forum 2018

The paper has to be seen in the context of co-operation, of a discussion guided by a few principles, proposing different scenarios, four topics and possible actions, tools and organisation.

At the next meeting in Madrid with partners from other regions on 30/31 January 2017, the dialogue with partners from other regions will go on with Latin America, Africa, Mediterranean and Arabic countries. Out of four proposed topics, the Advisory Group developed one main goal and a suggestion for the format of the Bologna Policy Forum: Enhancing international co-operation between regional higher education areas or

systems appears to be a relevant approach for the next BPF and a good way to develop a sustainable partnership policy (cf. presentation). This goal will be discussed during further meetings of the BFUG and the AG.

It was suggested not to formulate “strengthening the influence of EHEA ...”. Board members required highlighting what makes the BPF attractive, i.e. what is the aspect which is not offered at other international events/occasions.

8. Update by the BFUG Secretariat

The head of the Bologna Secretariat explained that the Terms of Reference for the Secretariat include the creation of a new website. Juliette Roussel worked a full year to design it and the responsive website was launched in September 2016. The feedback from BFUG and Board members was very positive. The representatives of countries and institutions once more were invited to send updates for their pages.

For the 2018 Ministerial Conference, an event manager had been employed and an internal committee has been set up. It is planned for 1.5-2 days in the second half of May 2018. More information will be available for the BFUG meeting in Bratislava.

9. Discussion on a permanent Bologna Secretariat post 2018 or post 2020

The Board members discussed the paper provided by the Bologna Secretariat. They suggested providing more information about the various options (e.g. what governance structure should be in place?). Funding options for a permanent secretariat are not fully explored in the paper presented at this Board meeting. Structural and organisational questions do exist, but the political impact and implications for the governance of the Bologna process are other relevant aspects.

Actually, 2020 is the target year of the Bologna process, therefore a decision in 2018 would only make sense together with a perspective beyond 2020. (At which point in time the BFUG will discuss the future after 2020?) It is not worth changing things for two years.

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

According to the previous Ministerial conference and all documents, 2020 will be the target year for the actual implementation period. Therefore a call for applications for the 2020 conference has to be prepared.

11. Report on the Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Board members took note of the report. ENICs exist in all countries, 31 countries have regulations covering recognition criteria and procedures. Interestingly, they are much better in procedures than in criteria. Seven countries have a definition of “substantial differences”. The degree of information provided varies a lot.

12. QF EHEA and EQF (report on the meeting of national correspondents for QF, New Skills Agenda)

The Board members took note of the report by the Council of Europe and its suggestion that the Malta BFUG meeting could integrate the thematic debate on qualifications frameworks in the EHEA, including their relationship to the EQF-LLL that had originally been foreseen for the Bratislava meeting. Self-certification is the end of the first phase of national qualification frameworks (referencing for EQF). The criteria for self-certifying/referencing against QF EHEA and EQF are compatible.

Board members remarked that it is still unclear how to include the short-cycle (WG2) in the qualification frameworks. Compatibility is more problematic now than before. The European Commission requested another debate in the responsible working group.

13. Information by the incoming Co-chairs

The next meeting of the BFUG Board will take place on 30 or 31 March in Oslo, Norway. Currently, Norway is merging institutions as a part of structural reforms. In 2017, a white paper on quality in higher education will be published.

The BFUG meeting will be organised on 24/25 May at the island of Gozo, Malta.

The drafting committee for the Communiqué will be launched during the first semester 2017.

14. Draft agenda for the BFUG meeting in Bratislava

The Practical Information will be sent this week. Main points of the agenda will be taken from the Amsterdam minutes. The proposed point 12 of the agenda will be deleted (the report on the QF EHEA will be available in written, the European Commission will include information about the EQF and the New Skills Agenda in its report). For the BFUG meeting in Malta, a session on qualifications frameworks has to be planned.

15. AOB

EAIE sent a letter to the BFUG asking to become a consultative member. The BFUG in Bratislava has to discuss this question and to propose a decision by the ministers for 2018. The proceedings clearly specify requirements for consultative members. One problem with EAIE is that its members are not institutions but individuals. The same request has been rejected before by the ministers. Criteria for consultative membership are explained in Annex 4 of the proceedings (added value to the Bologna Process, relevance of the stakeholder group, representativeness and organisational form).

End of the meeting