

Task Force on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat

Decisions on the establishment of the Long-term EHEA Secretariat and its hosting arrangement

For the XCIX BFUG meeting in Cyprus (March 2026)

The present document:

- summarizes the work on the establishment of a long-term Secretariat (LTS) in view of the decisions to be taken at the BFUG meeting in Nicosia.
- provides important updates as it considers the questions and suggestions of the BFUG raised at the meeting in Copenhagen, in particular regarding governance, budget, and fees.
- invites the BFUG members to consider the two hosting proposals made by Czech Republic and Romania for hosting the LTS. Please note that Germany withdrew its offer in January 2026 (the withdrawal letter available to BFUG delegates in UDrive).
- provides an overview of the work of Task Forces under the previous and present BFUG work cycle, including a detailed report on the activities since the last BFUG, and updated Roadmap detailing future activities from March 2026.

You are welcome to share your questions and comments before the BFUG via email to the EHEA Secretariat.

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1. The decision on establishing a long-term Secretariat at the BFUG Meeting in Nicosia

At its meeting in Nicosia (9-10 March), the BFUG is to decide on whether or not to establish in 2027 a long-term Secretariat (LTS), replacing the present rotating EHEA Secretariat provided by the host of the next Ministerial Conference (the go-no-go decision). Subsequently, the BFUG would select one of the two hosting offers.

During the BFUG meeting, the Task Force on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat (TF) will provide a short report on its recent activities. This will be followed by a presentation of the two potential hosts (Czech Republic and Romania), and there will be some time for asking questions and clarifications from potential hosts and the TF.

Following the presentations, the BFUG is to decide whether or not to establish the LTS, and who is to host it. The TF suggests to conduct it by a secret vote¹, through combining the casting and collection of two ballots:

- Ballot 1 on the go-no-go decision for establishing the LTS, based on the conditions proposed below, including the financial model (i.e. costs are shared between BFUG members through a differentiated fee model)
 - Question: Do you agree to establish the Long-term Secretariat for the Bologna Process?
 - Response options: Option 1: Yes; Option 2: No
- Ballot 2 on the choice of the host.
 - Which of the countries listed below should host the Long-term Secretariat? Please choose only one of the two options.
N.B.: All BFUG members can express their opinion on the second ballot, irrespective of the vote on ballot 1.
 - Response options: Option 1: Czech Republic; Option 2: Romania

The vote will take place under [Art VI of the RoP-BFUG](#). As usual, every country has two votes, i.e. will receive in total four ballots (two Ballot 1 and two Ballot 2). Abstentions, i.e. the ballots not cast or cast as blank, have no impact on the result - they are not counted towards the decision and cannot influence the validity of the vote. All ballots will be collected at once, and counted immediately after, as follows:

- Ballot 1 will be counted out first. The vote is decided with a two-thirds majority.
- Ballot 2 is only counted in case Ballot 1 results into a go decision ('yes' to the establishment of the LTS). The decision on the host is taken by a simple majority. In case of an even distribution of votes between the two candidates, Ballot 2 will be repeated. If this does not bring a decision, it will be decided by lot, unless one of the candidates prefers to withdraw.

¹ The BFUG can decide this matter through an opinion poll, followed by the BFUG co-chairs' conclusion. But as this is an important matter, the TF had suggested a secret vote. The BFUG Board (Oslo, 5 February 2026) accepted this proposal.

Consequences in case of a go-decision:

1. The LTS will be established in 2027, to take over the tasks from the present EHEA Secretariat after the Ministerial Conference (1st of July 2027). This will take place in line with the steps already agreed and included in the roadmap (see below), i.e. the development of the Terms of References and of Statutes for the LTS, including the details of the governance approach and the budgetary and financial issues, to be discussed and agreed at the subsequent three BFUG meetings in autumn 2026, and spring 2027.
2. The host of the next Ministerial Conference in 2030 would not have to provide a Secretariat.
3. The LTS arrangement will be re-evaluated in 2033.

Consequences in case of a no-go-decision:

1. The LTS will not be established. The present approach of the rotating EHEA Secretariat will be maintained.
2. The host of the next Ministerial Conference in 2030 would have to provide the Secretariat for the 2027-2030 period.
3. The TF may provide suggestions for the BFUG on how the approach of the rotating Secretariat could be enhanced, to reduce the impact of the 2-3-year changes.

Whatever the decision will be, it will conclude the systematic exploration and discussion of this matter, which commenced in 2022. Subject to the final endorsement by the Ministers at the 2027 Conference, it should be accepted and followed by all EHEA members.

2. The proposals for hosting the long-term EHEA Secretariat

At the BFUG meeting in Denmark in December 2025 (see [minutes](#) and [documents](#) submitted by the TF), the BFUG shortlisted three of the five applicants for hosting the long-term EHEA Secretariat, namely Czech Republic, Germany and Romania. In January 2026, Germany decided to withdraw their application.

The Czech Republic proposes to establish the LTS as an internal structure within the Czech National Agency for Internationalisation and Research (DZS), without establishing a separate legal entity for the LTS. In this case, each BFUG member should join a consortium agreement governed by Czech public law, which would resemble features of an association yet not be considered a private law agreement or establish an association as such. Please find the application of CZ [here](#) and the additional answers for clarification [here](#). Based on the request for clarification from the Task Force, particularly on the legal basis for BFUG members to be able to transfer funds to the DZS, the applicability of VAT regime and the governance arrangements, the Czech Republic submitted an additional document with clarifications. (available for BFUG delegates through UDrive).

Romania proposed to establish the LTS as a non-profit association with a separate legal entity and own budget. The BFUG members should join the association as members, thus being represented in its General Assembly, and pay membership fees to the association. Please find the application of RO [here](#) and the additional answers [here](#).

3. Rationale and concept of the Long-term Secretariat

The EHEA Secretariat supports the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the BFUG and its working structures. Presently, it is a temporary secretariat, which must be newly established every two to three years, with new staff provided by the government party which hosts the next Ministerial Conference.

The BFUG has discussed and considered replacing the present arrangement with a long-term secretariat (LTS) with hired staff on longer-term work contracts, reporting directly to the BFUG. It concluded that such an arrangement would be better suited to manage the higher and more complex workload that the BFUG has been facing over the past years, and thoroughly guard and maintain the corpus of policies and instruments that the Bologna Process has developed over almost three decades.

From 2022 to 2024, the BFUG has explored the feasibility, likely consequences, and impact of such an arrangement. In the 2024 Tirana Communique, the EHEA Ministers in charge of higher education took note of these efforts and invited the BFUG to explore the matter further. The BFUG established to this purpose the Task Force for establishing a Long-term Secretariat (Budapest, September 2024).

So far, the BFUG has been able to conclude the following for LTS:

1. Its **principles**: independent, accountable to the BFUG, not-for-profit and sustainable.
2. Its **tasks**: the LTS would have the same tasks as the present Secretariat, only that it would conduct them continuously.
3. The **staff**: The Head of Secretariat would be an experienced professional, leading a small team of appropriately qualified staff from different EHEA countries. If needed, the Head of Secretariat and individual staff members can be replaced.
4. Its **governance**: The LTS would be accountable to the BFUG. This would be established through a governance system in which the BFUG would supervise the LTS through an appropriate governance structure. The Head of LTS would be selected by the BFUG. Contracts of all LTS staff can be terminated, if required.
5. Its **budget and financial sustainability**: The LTS should have sufficient budget, established jointly by the BFUG members; the European Commission confirmed that it will continue to provide its contribution.
6. Its **legal form**: a non-profit association established as a private-law entity was considered feasible from the organisational, financial and legal points of views. This does not principally exclude any other approach (e.g., the one proposed by the Czech Republic), provided it can fulfill the same tasks and conditions.
7. Its **location, hosted by an EHEA member**: While the LTS is independent, and can be established in any EHEA country, support from the BFUG member of the hosting country is very much welcomed. As an outcome of a call for expression of interest and the shortlisting, two countries, Czech Republic and Romania, are at the disposal for this role. Both members have provided an attractive and generous offer of support (including free of charge provision of premises), which will strengthen

the independence of the LTS, and its exclusive accountability to the BFUG.

At its meeting in Copenhagen (December 2025), the BFUG concluded therefore that the LTS is feasible, not only legally, from the point of organization and governance, but also financially, provided the readiness of the BFUG members to share the costs. Therefore, the BFUG needs to formally decide on whether or not it should be established in view of its feasibility, sustainability and the services it would provide for the EHEA, in line with the process spelled out in the [Tirana Communiqué](#)².

4. Tasks and Responsibilities of the Long-term Secretariat

The EHEA Secretariat has an administrative and technical support function. The strategic and political guidance lies with the BFUG. The Terms of Reference of the Secretariat outlines, among others its contribution to the following main tasks:

- **Management of the EHEA work plan**
 - supporting the BFUG Co-chairs drafting the work plan;
 - supporting its implementation throughout the period, in coordination with the responsible working structures.
- **Administrative and operational support for the BFUG, its Board and all BFUG sub-structures**
 - assisting in planning the meetings;
 - drafting background documents and reports;
 - drafting minutes;
 - ensuring communication between different bodies and working structures.
- **Consistent communication within and outside EHEA structures**
 - managing and updating the EHEA website at all times;
 - sharing information with members and stakeholders;
 - serving as contact point for outside parties interested in the Bologna Process and the EHEA,
 - representing the EHEA at external events/meetings within the mandate agreed by the BFUG co-chairs;
 - maintaining contact with other structures and initiatives in Europe and beyond (e.g. European Research Area, ASEM);
- **Support the organisation of the EHEA Ministerial Conferences and Policy Forums**
 - ensuring coordination with the BFUG in close collaboration with the host country
- **Management of the EHEA finances**
 - preparing an annual budget;
 - managing accounting and providing annual accounts.

² We adopt the “Rules of Procedure for the EHEA” and invite the BFUG to adopt revised Rules of procedure of for its own work in due course; we mandate the BFUG to continue working on the possibility of establishing a long-term, independent, internationally staffed Secretariat to create effective support for the BFUG, and to evaluate the feasibility and sustainability of the related proposals, models, and terms of reference in Spring 2026, to be presented for adoption and implementation at our 2027 Ministerial Conference; and we agree to undertake an assessment of the chosen arrangement after two work periods.

5. Staff and secondments

In line with the Secretariat's tasks, responsibilities and principles as described above, the TF estimated the necessary staff and budget.

Based on the experiences of the previous Secretariats, the estimated staffing needs are the following:

1. The Head of Secretariat

- is the team leader and overall coordinator;
- to be filled by a highly skilled professional with strong expertise in European cooperation, understanding of higher education policy and experience in managing a small, dynamic team;
- entitled to recruit the necessary staff (in line with the budget agreed by the BFUG);
- to be recruited through an open competition and appointment by the BFUG, or with its approval;
- fully accountable to the BFUG, and to undergo an annual appraisal;
- to be recruited through an Europe-wide open and advertised competitive selection process, transparent, inclusive, and merit-based;
- for an initial contract of five to six years, renewable.

2. Staff

The LTS staff consists of:

- **Policy Officers** – support BFUG/working structures both in terms of policy and logistics. In most cases, one officer supports two/three working structures, therefore 4 or 5 officers are usually required;
- **Communications Officer** – responsible for overseeing both internal and external communication;
- **Administrative Officer** - managing administrative tasks in the country hosting the Secretariat;

This leads to **approximately 7 FTE** staff, to manage the present tasks and workload. Obviously, the staff numbers can be adjusted to changing workloads, resulting either permanently or temporarily in higher or lower staff costs. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the capacity of the Secretariat and scope of its support to the EHEA structures will depend on the financial capacity, thus non-payment of members' contribution may affect the implementation of the respective Work plan.

3. Secondments

Seconding staff should in principle be a possibility open to all BFUG members and consultative members. The host country of the next Ministerial Conference should second one staff member to the Secretariat to facilitate liaison with the local organising team. In addition, the Secretariat host country may second one further staff member.

The Task Force advises a ratio of no less than two-thirds contracted staff to one third seconded staff, and only provided that continuity can be secured through commitment to a reliable and binding schedule for secondment.

Staff should be seconded for at least 1 year, but preferably for the full duration of the work programme, for example to support a certain number of working structures over the entire working period, or for specific tasks. All this would be feasible under the above proposed scheme, but may need further consideration also regarding the management and cost implications.

6. Budget

Budget estimates cannot be based on the costs of previous secretariats, as the total cost of running the Secretariat varies greatly depending on the country, especially due to different levels of staffing and local salaries. Moreover, there has been no explicit reporting of the actual costs covered by host countries, e.g. in-kind contributions such as office space or staff covered by national budgets. In addition, as the intention is to employ staff from different EHEA countries, salaries and employment conditions must be sufficiently attractive, regardless of the location of the Secretariat.

The following is an estimate of the annual costs based on the staff needs described above, in consideration of present price levels. Following the conclusions of the BFUG in Copenhagen, the budget reflects a need to develop a reserve fund which should allow for the handling of unexpected financial situations or temporary problems with the collection of some members' contributions. The fees will be approved annually at the General Assembly (or similar body) and reviewed along with the LTS in 2033.

This budget is still a rough estimate, in case of the approval of the LTS and selection of the concrete proposal to host the secretariat, the detailed one – including a more concrete scope of the host's in-kind contribution – will be proposed to the BFUG in autumn 2026 in Dublin for final approval, including particular arrangements for a budget in 2027.

Item	Estimated cost (EUR)
Staff salaries (7 FTE)	632 450 €
Travel/meeting costs (BFUG structures, occasional representation)	60 000 €
Office space	18 000 €
Other administrative costs	50 000 €
Total	760 450 €
Reserve building (approx. 15 %)	122 589 €
TOTAL SUM	883 039 €

Figure 1 – Estimated annual budget

7. Financial Contributions by EHEA Members

The TF found no other feasible model for covering the costs of the LTS than the joint contribution from EHEA members. This has been presented at the BFUG in Copenhagen (Dec 2025) and met the agreement of the BFUG. The TF has been invited by BFUG members to establish fee levels that provide an appropriate budget with a sufficient reserve, to ensure the financial sustainability of the LTS.

The proposal assumes that the European Commission would continue to contribute to the funding of the EHEA Secretariat (currently ca. EUR 250 000 per year through the Erasmus+ programme). The fees for countries would have to cover approximately 615.000 €. In addition, the two potential host countries are offering generous in-kind contributions, notably free of charge premises.

Item	Estimated contribution (EUR)
Host in-kind contribution	18 000 €
EU annual contribution (Erasmus+)	250 000 €
EHEA members' contributions	615 039 €
TOTAL SUM	883 039 €

Figure 2 – Division of contributions

In order to share the costs of the Secretariat fairly and to ensure sustainable funding, the TF recommends that the Secretariat be financed by annual contributions by EHEA countries,

differentiated based on the GDP and GDP per capita, similar to the system currently used by EQAR (see calculation method for EQAR available for BFUG delegates on UDrive). This approach has been supported by the BFUG Board (Oslo, 5 February 2026).

The calculation is based on the current number of active BFUG members (47 - excluding the EC and the 2 suspended countries). It does not include contributions from consultative members, which would not have voting rights. For a division per country, see annex 4 below.

Indicative annual contributions per country			
	Members per group	Membership fee	Fee per group
Group 1 countries	11	€ 21 965	€ 241 615
Group 2 countries	8	€ 16 474	€ 131 792
Group 3 countries	16	€ 10 983	€ 175 728
Group 4 countries	12	€ 5 492	€ 65 904
Total	47		€ 615 039

Figure 3 – Contributions per BFUG member

Note: Based on the EQAR Formula, using GDP and GDP per capita for all EHEA countries and [IMF WEO](#) data from 2021

The BFUG has to assume that principally all EHEA countries would be willing and able to contribute financially. This matter has been addressed on several occasions, in particular at the BFUG meetings in Warsaw and in Copenhagen.

The TF found that in the case of non-profit associations, there should be no obstacle, considering also that the overwhelming majority of BFUG members are also members of EQAR, where they are paying membership fees.

The TF has invited BFUG members to share their concerns and legal and practical difficulties, allowing the development of practical, even sui generis solutions. But it did not receive any reaction on this matter.

While every member is expected to pay, this would not exclude the possibility that in exceptional cases the BFUG may grant an individual member a delay of payment (e.g. during national crises).

8. Legal Form and Structure

Advantages of a non-profit association

The BFUG has been presented with and discussed several options for establishing the LTS. A non-profit association appeared as a feasible and appropriate form for the Secretariat, in terms of organization, governance and also for managing the budget and finances. It is further confirmed by the experience of such a setup of EQAR.

Based on the above requirements, the TF explored several models for establishing a private-law legal entity, in consideration of the above requirements, and of the prior work on the topic in the previous period (see also [Bergan & Geanta \(2020\)](#)), as well as the suggestions provided in the applications for hosting the Secretariat.

A non-profit association appeared as a feasible and appropriate form for the Secretariat, confirmed also by the good experience made with the setup of EQAR. A foundation or even a non-profit company could be alternatives, but the TF concluded that the association would be preferable as it aligns better with the purpose and tasks of the Secretariat, and the governance model of the BFUG.

From the review of the hosting proposals which offered an association (Cyprus, German, Romania), the TF also concluded that national legal framework of associations differ only in detail.

A non-profit association is relatively easy to establish in most EHEA jurisdictions, even though the details and regulatory framework differ slightly between jurisdictions. A small group of countries could act as founding members.

Membership & governance

The membership and governing structure of the association can, to some extent, be based on and aligned with the existing governance framework of the EHEA. These settings would be implemented similarly for the governance of the Secretariat as an independent unit within the national agency in the case of the Czech proposal – the BFUG would serve as the structure corresponding to a General Assembly.

a. General Assembly

The **EHEA members** would be members of the association, forming its general assembly (GA) with identical voting rights as in the BFUG. Ideally, the country's representative in the GA and the BFUG should be identical, for practical reasons and to ensure the BFUG's ultimate authority.

The regulations should be flexible and allow countries to have either the ministry responsible for higher education itself or another organisation designated by it, e.g. a national public agency, act as member of the association. This should, however, not change the participation of the BFUG, where countries are represented by the public authority responsible for higher education or representatives designated by this public authority and acting on its behalf.

Consultative members of the EHEA would be non-voting members of the association. They

would automatically be considered as such and be invited to participate in the GA - without voting rights - based on their status in the BFUG. They would not be expected to become members or to contribute financially. International organisations like CoE and UNESCO could be invited as observers to the GA, having similar rights as the other non-voting members even if their legal status would not allow them to formally join the association. The EQAR statutes include similar provisions regarding permanent observers to the GA of EQAR.

b. Steering Committee (or Management Committee)

The BFUG itself (the GA of the association) cannot oversee the work of the LTS to the necessary detail, regarding organizational, legal and financial issues. It needs to establish a dedicated structure for this purpose. While usually named “executive board” or “Board of Directors”, Steering Committee (or Management Committee or similar) might be more appropriate, and avoid confusion³.

The task and the work of association board require acquaintance with the operational details of the LTS (budget, staff and their contracts, technical and financial reports, income and expenditure etc.), which requires some time and continuity.

This function cannot be exercised by the BFUG Board, which has different competences, and also a relatively high turnover (e.g. co-chairs change every 6 months). Apart from the EC, the more continuous Board members are consultative members, who would not be full members of the association. In addition, membership of the Steering Committee should be ad personam. The individual member should not be replaced temporarily by a colleague from the same ministry or organization.

It is suggested to compose the Steering Committee of 5 individuals:

- two country members, who are active and experienced in the BFUG work (suggested and confirmed by the BFUG), one member of the European Union and one a non-EU member
- a representative of the European Commission, who serves on the BFUG Board (and in the BFUG)
- a representative of the host country/vice chair of the BFUG
- one of the consultative members, suggested by consultative members

The SC would attend the BFUG Board with at least two representatives. Presence of all is possible, but not required. SC members should consider the advice of the Board and follow the decision of the BFUG.

The SC members would share the role of chair and treasurer in rotation. They would be appointed for one working period, with unrestricted possibility for renewal. If a country member steps down or leaves the BFUG, the BFUG will identify new candidates for appointment, to be confirmed by the BFUG. If the consultative member steps down, the consultative members will suggest a successor. If the representative of the EC steps down, they would usually be replaced by their successor.

³ As there is already the BFUG Board, and the members of this structure may actually not be “Directors”.

Annex 1 - The BFUG's work on the Long-term Secretariat

i. Task Force on the Review of Rules and Regulations for the governance of the EHEA (2022-24)

The Task Force on the Review of Rules and Regulations for the governance of the EHEA (2022-24) concluded that a more long-term arrangement for the EHEA Secretariat poses no unsurmountable challenges and would better support the governing structures of the Bologna Process and thus lead to a more efficient functioning of the EHEA. The issue was discussed at the BFUG meetings in [Stockholm](#) and [Madrid](#) in 2023, and at the two BFUGs in Brussels in [February](#) and [April](#) 2024. Ministers responsible for higher education in the EHEA gave the BFUG a mandate to further explore the matter.

The Task Force explored different options and scenarios. It discarded in the period 2023-2024 the options of contracting a service provider, the establishment of an international organization, and the provision of the Secretariat by a member or a consultative member.

The BFUG confirmed as the one remaining option the establishment of a private-law entity. It also confirmed that, while the Secretariat could in principle be established anywhere in the EHEA, ideally a member or consultative member should offer a hosting arrangement, that would support the Secretariat, in the period of its establishment, and beyond, without infringing its independence, neutrality and accountability solely to the BFUG.

ii. Task Force on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat (2024-2027)

The BFUG established a Task Force on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat, under the new 2024-2027 work cycle to:

1. Develop further the proposals for the establishment of a long-term, independent, and internationally staffed Secretariat for the EHEA, in particular regarding governance and funding.
2. Prepare a call for proposals for hosting countries/organisations, to be endorsed by the BFUG, and disseminated by the Secretariat.
3. Organise the evaluation of applications, including the assessment of the regulations and conditions of applicant countries/organisations.
4. Provide a reasoned proposal for the arrangements and terms of reference for the Long-term Secretariat, with a proposal for the hosting country/organisation, to the BFUG.
5. Prepare discussion and decision-making process at the BFUG, for a decision on the Long-term Secretariat (tentatively spring 2026).
6. In case it is decided to establish a Long-term Secretariat, following the indications of the BFUG, propose its draft statutes by autumn 2026, for discussion and endorsement by the BFUG (tentatively autumn 2026).
7. Advise the BFUG on the further preparation of the new Secretariat, including the job description for the head of Secretariat (tentatively autumn 2026).

The TF consists of one delegate from Czech Republic (co-chair until Spring 2025), European Commission, EQAR, European University Association (co-chair), Germany (since Dec 2025), Italy, Iceland (co-chair since Spring 2025), Hungary, Kazakhstan, Romania, San Marino (until Dec. 2025), and Turkey.

It provided regular reports to the BFUG Board and the BFUG. In Spring 2025, it organized a call for expressions of interest for hosting the LTS (deadline 12 June). Five members (CY, CZ, DE, RO, TK) submitted a detailed offer, explaining how they would host the LTS in fulfilling the required conditions, and also regarding their support offer, and in-kind contributions. This was also explained during an online meeting with the five potential hosts (22 October).

BFUG meeting in Copenhagen (13-14 Dec 2025)

The TF evaluated the results of the [Call](#) (see [comparative overview of applications](#) and [results of the review](#)), and presented them at the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen (13-14 Dec), together with an [updated concept note](#) for the LTS. The BFUG shortlisted the offers of the Czech Republic, Germany, and Romania.

It also indicated what would be further needed for its go-no-go decision on the establishment of the LTS at the BFUG in March in Nicosia, namely:

- Clarification of the governance approach: how to relate the existing structures of the BFUG to the governance of the LTS. The main open issue was the question of how to establish an executive board to oversee the work of the LTS:
 - The BFUG Board is not particularly well placed for this, due to the relatively high turnover of its (voting) members; co-chairs change every six months
 - Establishing an additional new structure would require cautious alignment of its tasks and competences with those of the BFUG Board.
- A clear proposal regarding the fees that each member would have to pay.
- A budget proposal that would have sufficient financial reserves.
- An indication of the contract length of the Head of the LTS.

Work between Copenhagen and Nicosia

After the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen, the TF met four times. Germany joined as a new member, so that all shortlisted three applicants for the hosting of the long-term Secretariat (LTS) were part of the TF. In addition to their BFUG representatives, colleagues from their administrations were welcome to attend, and have done so, to provide information on the hosting arrangement, or follow up on questions and requests. The TF also requested and received further written clarifications from the three candidates.

TF meeting 16 December

The TF discussed the outcomes of the BFUG meeting, in particular how to respond to the request for additional clarification and details on fees, their levels and their collection, the size of the budget, also to ensure sustainability of the LTS, the contract of the head of the LTS, and the governance approach. The three shortlisted candidates were invited to provide further reflections regarding the national association rules (DE, RO), the arrangement that would regulate the relations between the BFUG and the host (CZ), and more concrete information on the practical arrangement for the LTS, including in kind contributions. The EC informed that scenarios for

financing the Secretariat's activities or providing support for the payment of the membership fees are considered.

A written request was sent on 23 December 2025, and all (then) three candidates provided responses by the deadline, on 14 January 2026.

TF meeting 15 January

The meeting was attended by (then) all three candidates, along with colleagues from their respective administrations. The colleagues who are not the BFUG and did not attend the last TF meeting were informed about the results of the BFUG's discussions and the resulting questions and requests.

It was concluded that, in consideration of the additional responses provided by Germany and Romania, it appears that there should be no discernible obstacle for the establishment of the LTS in DE or RO, nor for its governance. It is for the BFUG to decide on how to align the governance requirements stipulated by national association rules with the ones of the BFUG.

Specifically for Romania, the RO Ministry of Education (MoE) can meet the requirements within the allotted time frame. It should be mentioned that Ro MoE acts based on the additional legal checks and permissions that may require time. Therefore, the membership of a Romanian university in the association has been proposed, which would considerably accelerate the process. The university would act as an inactive member, and once the association has been established, it could even end its membership. *Nota bene:* it does not have to be the same university, that is chosen to host the premises of the LTS.

While the estimated time required for establishing an association in either DE or RO is well under three months, the process should be started early, as gathering the necessary documentation, including signatures by the founding members, establishment of a bank account, etc. require time.

Regarding the Czech Republic, it was discussed how to establish an agreement that would guarantee maximum independence of the LTS and its staff. CZ colleagues confirmed once more that there would be only minor regulatory requirements and restrictions for the LTS in the framework of the DZS. They also underlined their readiness to develop together with BFUG an agreement tailored to the needs and requirements of the LTS, including for the governance (see below).

Transfer of fees to and the establishment of a budget for the LTS is, from the perspective of DZS, not a problem: similar as for European Union funded projects, it could establish a separate budget line for the LTS. But the question emerged on whether other BFUG members, including the EC, in consideration of their own rules and regulations, could easily transfer a financial contribution to the DZS.

In addition, the exchanges addressed selected issues of the hosting arrangements; DZS offers the LTS to participate in its general IT infrastructure and services, but with an independent network, but anything beyond, such as PCs, laptops would have to be purchased from the LTS

budget.

TF meeting 21st of January

The TF discussed the report for the BFUG Board meeting, which was agreed by the TF. The European Commission recalled the pending question on whether it would be problematic for the EC to transfer the funds to the Czech Erasmus+ Agency (DZS), and confirmed that from the EC side there would be no issues in this regard. However, it was noted that the situation might be different for BFUG members in consideration of their national legislation. The TF agreed that this remains an open issue with the Czech colleagues, following-up with potential solutions pending discussions with their lawyers. The TF further discussed how to plan the session for the BFUG meeting in Cyprus.

TF meeting 12th of February

The TF was presented with the results of the BFUG Board meeting. The Board endorsed the planning proposal for the BFUG regarding presentation of the LTS, and the method and approach for decision-making.

The Board also considered the advantages and disadvantages of the two fee models, namely equal fees or a differentiated fees model based on weighing objective criteria (e.g., GDP and GDP per capita as in EQAR model). It found the differentiated fees model more adequate and unanimously recommended it to the BFUG for the decision on establishing a long-term Secretariat to be taken in Cyprus (Go/No-Go decision). This is important, as uncertainty of the fee model could have made it difficult for national ministries to understand the financial implications of the LTS.

The Board also reflected on the contribution of the European Commission, whether it should be used as reserve, or as a fund to support members not able to pay the fee. But it was concluded that the EC's contribution should go into the LTS budget along with the fees of other members, leaving it for the BFUG to discuss and decide how the budget would be spent.

Finally, it was emphasised that BFUG members should receive the information on the SEC as early as possible.

In addition, the TF recommended further enhancement of the document that CZ had developed to explain the possible allocation of financial contributions to the DZS.

Annex 2 – Advantages and disadvantages of the rotating and long-term Secretariat (2024)

<p>Advantages of a rotating secretariat</p> <p>emphasises the fact that the EHEA is based on the proactive engagement of its members, even beyond holding the rotating Ministerial conferences;</p> <p>contributes to a sense of broad shared ownership and responsibility;</p> <p>helps to ensure that the hosting country is responsibly involved for the entire period, and therefore well-prepared to host and organise the Ministerial Conference</p>	<p>Challenges of a rotating secretariat</p> <p>host countries have different understandings and approaches to the Secretariat;</p> <p>the Secretariat's neutrality and independence of the hosting country can be challenging to ensure; usually entirely new Secretariat team, sometimes with little prior experience in the EHEA, needs time to take over from the previous host country and to fully take up its tasks, leading to a period of large and recurrent instability during each handover period;</p> <p>lack of continuity leads to frequent technical issues, especially in relation to the transfer and further development of the website, the establishment and maintenance of an archive, enhanced vulnerability to cyberattacks with changing hosting and security, etc.;</p> <p>hosting the Ministerial Conference always comes with the responsibility to provide the Secretariat for a three-year term, which requires significant financial, organisational and human resources investment borne by one single country;</p> <p>despite other EHEA countries occasionally seconding staff, all team members usually come from one single country, which does not reflect the European nature of the Bologna Process.</p>
<p>Advantages of a long-term Secretariat</p> <p>ensure business continuity for all EHEA countries and provide a more continuous, stable and reliable support structure for the EHEA, not relying on countries volunteering;</p> <p>staffed with an international team of professionals, with a potential for long-term contracts allowing a rolling staff turn-over instead of changing the entire team at once;</p> <p>enable sustainable staff development and capacity building, so that the Secretariat can gain and maintain a solid knowledge base and expertise in serving the EHEA and its bodies;</p> <p>provide a stable contact point for stakeholders from within and outside the EHEA; ensure co-ownership of the Secretariat by all EHEA countries;</p> <p>reduce the financial and logistical burden on the host country of the Ministerial Conference, and allow to focus on content-related issues, thus making hosting more attractive.</p>	<p>Challenges of a long-term Secretariat</p> <p>necessity to ensure the neutrality and the accountability of the Secretariat, acting under the authority of the BFUG and in line with the guidance documents adopted by the Ministerial conference and the BFUG;</p> <p>making the staff positions sufficiently attractive to get a suitably qualified international team, and making the team, as much as possible, geographically representative of the EHEA;</p> <p>financial contributions might be needed from all EHEA countries, thus also including those that would otherwise never host a Ministerial Conference.</p>

Annex 3 – Future Roadmap

Date	What	Who
Spring 2026	GO / NO GO DECISION Selection of the potential Secretariat host/ location Alternatively, a call for a “rotating secretariat” linked to the host of the next ministerial conference 2030	BFUG Input TF
Spring - Autumn 2026	Drafting Statutes, review of EHEA Rules of procedure, identification of potential necessary changes. Capacity specifications, resources	Host & TF
Autumn 2026	Approval of the statutes of the new legal entity and selection of the Head of Secretariat	BFUG
Autumn 2026 - Spring 2027	Founding the new legal entity in the chosen location / other relevant steps	BFUG, TF, Host accordingly
First half of 2027	Recruitment and training of further staff Organisational preparation	Head of the Secretariat
Spring 2027	Official launch of the EHEA Secretariat During the Ministerial conference	Ministerial Conference
1 July 2027	EHEA Secretariat full operation Take over of the agenda of the previous EHEA secretariat	EHEA Secretariat

Annex 4 – Potential membership fees for a long-term Secretariat based on the differentiated fee model

ISO	Country	Group	Membership fee	Members per group	
DEU	Germany	1	21 965	11	
GBR	United Kingdom	1	21 965		
FRA	France	1	21 965		
LIE	Liechtenstein	1	21 965		
ITA	Italy	1	21 965		
CHE	Switzerland	1	21 965		
IRL	Ireland	1	21 965		
LUX	Luxembourg	1	21 965		
ESP	Spain	1	21 965		
NLD	Netherlands	1	21 965		
RUS	Russia	1	21 965		
NOR	Norway	1	21 965	8	
SWE	Sweden	2	16 474		
DNK	Denmark	2	16 474		
BEL	Belgium	2	16 474		
AUT	Austria	2	16 474		
FIN	Finland	2	16 474		
ISL	Iceland	2	16 474		
TUR	Türkiye	2	16 474		
POL	Poland	2	16 474		
SMR	San Marino	3	10 983		16
CZE	Czech Republic	3	10 983		
PRT	Portugal	3	10 983		
AND	Andorra	3	10 983		
ROU	Romania	3	10 983		

GRC	Greece	3	10 983	
SVN	Slovenia	3	10 983	
MLT	Malta	3	10 983	
HUN	Hungary	3	10 983	
CYP	Cyprus	3	10 983	
SVK	Slovak Republic	3	10 983	
EST	Estonia	3	10 983	
LTU	Lithuania	3	10 983	
KAZ	Kazakhstan	3	10 983	
LVA	Latvia	3	10 983	
HRV	Croatia	3	10 983	
UKR	Ukraine	4	5 492	12
BGR	Bulgaria	4	5 492	
SRB	Serbia	4	5 492	
BLR	Belarus			
MNE	Montenegro	4	5 492	
AZE	Azerbaijan	4	5 492	
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina	4	5 492	
MKD	North Macedonia	4	5 492	
ALB	Albania	4	5 492	
GEO	Georgia	4	5 492	
MDA	Moldova	4	5 492	
ARM	Armenia	4	5 492	
VAT	Holy See	4	5 492	
	TOTAL	47	615 039	