

Report to the BFUG Board

Task Force on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat

1. Work of the TF so far

The Task Force had 8 meetings online and in person.

Its work focused on

- 1) Exploration of the long-term Secretariat. The discussions focused in particular on the legal form, its implications and opportunities for the organization and work of the Secretariat, but also the governance structure and accountability towards the BFUG.
- 2) the hosting arrangement, with the preparation and launch of the call, and the review and discussion of the applications received.

Both activities went hand in hand, with a lot of cross-fertilization.

In response to the call for hosting the long-term Secretariat, five applications have been received, from Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania, and Türkiye.

The Task Force has conducted a thorough review of the applications, as follows

- The applications were shared with all TF members and discussed. On the basis of the available information, the TF concluded that principally all applications provided interesting and feasible proposals and settings to establish the Secretariat. But it also agree that there was not sufficient or sufficiently detailed information by individual applicants to review the initial applications against the criteria for the long-term Secretariat (independence, governance, employment etc.), and to compare them with each other. Therefore, additional questions were sent to applicants.
- As the initial submissions had not always quoted internationally competitive salaries, the batch of additional questions also included a grid of mock salaries, borrowed from UN salary grid, with the request to state brutto and netto salaries, to get an idea of national taxation and employer costs etc.
- On the basis of the submitted application and the responses to the additional questions, each application has been reviewed by three reviewers, all members of the TF, independently from each other, with the aid of a review form that considered the established criteria for the long-term Secretariat (independence, governance, employment etc.). Care was taken to ensure that the reviews of individual applicants were carried out by reviewers who had no connections to the applying country.

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- The completed review forms were circulated to the TF, which in a meeting compared and discussed the results. The discussion focused particularly on feasibility of the legal form, and its potential implications for the governance and functioning of the SEC.
- Additional information was gained through the open information session for all BFUG members (22 Oct).

2. Preliminary conclusions

The TF came to the following conclusions

- 1) Regarding the legal form:
 - a. The Secretariat could be established as an association, a foundation, and possibly also a non-profit company (proposed by Cyprus and Germany, but possibly also feasible in other countries).
 - b. The majority of applications indicates that an association is the most feasible and suitable form for the SEC.
 - c. In addition, two applicants proposed a different approach:
 - i. The Czech Republic suggests hosting the SEC in a national agency. It would not be an independent legal entity, but would function under the umbrella of the national Erasmus+ agency. While formally the national agency would be responsible and accountable, the applicant assures that the SEC can operate in full independence. Alternatively, an association is also possible in the Czech Republic.
 - ii. In Türkiye, the SEC cannot be established as an association. It would have to be established an “entity of international nature”, which requires the permission of the president.
- 2) Costs of the Secretariat

Applications included estimates for costs, including staff. In addition, all but one applicant have provided information on labour costs and taxes based on mock salaries established through the UN salary grid. Once the TF has fully analysed and discussed these results, it will share them with the BFUG. This is important for the broader discussion on the SEC and its budget. But it is not expected to be a major criterion or determinant for the decision on the hosting arrangement; potential hosts only shared information on the costs, but they are not in any way in the position of influencing them. In addition, the current assumption is that while living, operational and labour costs differ across the applicant countries, internationally attractive salaries, which would have to be provided for the Director and other senior staff positions would be quite similar in different countries.

- 3) Financial & in-kind contributions

However, what could make a difference are applicants’ in-kind and financial contributions. They can be found in the applications.

- 4) Results of the review process so far

The review form used by the TF worked well, in that it produced a rich analysis with many useful comments from the reviewers. However, it became evident that reviewers used the score and colour scale differently. In a next step, the TF will discuss and agree collectively on the score for each category/applicant. Once that is done, the review results will be shared with the BFUG.

5) Establishment of a shortlist

The ToRs foresee the establishment of a shortlist with 2 or 3 potential hosts. This would reduce the effort and work for the further exploration of the hosting arrangement, for the TF and for applicants, but still keep options open, also in case a short-listed host should decide to resign.

The decision on the shortlist needs to be taken by the BFUG. The TF will provide for the BFUG in Copenhagen the necessary documents to inform the BFUG's decision and propose an approach for decision making¹.

3. Copenhagen BFUG

1. Information basis

Information already provided

- Applications
- Responses to the additional questions

Information to be provided by 1 December

- A concept note on the long-term Secretariat – and update from the [previous one](#), which will give enhanced attention to costs, budget, governance and the involvement and contribution to individual BFUG members.
- Hosting arrangement
 - Reviews of the applications
 - Comparative overview doc, which will summarise and compare the main points and characteristics, highlight communalities and differences, and also point to strengths, weaknesses and open issues regarding the individual applications.

Opportunity for additional questions

In addition, the TF will open for the period of 13 Nov to 6 Dec an online facility for submitting questions to individual and all applicants. Questions will be writing. Questions and answers will be visible to all BFUG members.

2. BFUG

¹ The TF is an expert group, and the not representative of the BFUG.

15 Dec

Longterm Secretariat

The TF will present the main points from the concept note regarding

- a. Establishment of a legal entity
- b. Governance
- c. Staffing
- d. Costs & budget
- e. Finances, and the contribution of individual BFUG members

Followed by discussion. There is no need to take a decision, but it would be good to understand:

- What further information is needed by the BFUG in preparation of the Go/No-go decision
- Specific issues that individual BFUG members may foresee, and any further support they might need.

B. **Hosting arrangement:**

- The TF will present briefly the main results from the call and the review of the applications, and the approach for establishing the shortlist.
- Questions should focus on the process and hosting in general.
- It is not planned to discuss individual applications,
- as BFUG members had the opportunity to attend the info session, and submit questions beforehand.
- This will be followed by an opinion poll, under a “**Plurality-at-large**” approach. Each ballot can select no more than the available places (three), without indication of any internal ranking. This approach has been previously used by the BFUG for the elections of the BFUG Board members before the current rotating arrangement. The three applications with the highest number will go forward. Given the time needed for evaluating the poll, the results can be announced after the end of the session, but before the closing of the meeting.

16 Dec.

A brief exchange on open issues, and in particular regarding the questions raised above.