

Meeting Minutes

7th meeting of the Task Force on establishing a long-term Secretariat

13th of October 2025, 10:00 – 16:00 CEST

Brussels, Belgium

List of participants

Nr.	Country/Organisation	Name
1.	Czech Republic	Michal Karpisek
2.	EUA (Co-chair)	Michael Gaebel
3.	European Commission	Hugo Miguel Pinto de Abreu
4.	EQAR	Aleksandar Šušnjar
5.	Hungary	András Báló (online)
6.	Iceland, Co-chair	Una Strand Viðarsdóttir
7.	Italy (online)	Luca Lantero
8.	Kazakhstan (online)	Rauza Mendaliyeva
9.	Romania (online)	Luminița Matei
10.	Türkiye (online)	Aydin Aslan
11.	EHEA Secretariat	Horia Onița

San Marino sent their apologies.

The meeting started at 10:02 CEST.

1. Welcome and introduction from the TF co-chairs

The EUA and Icelandic co-chairs welcomed everyone and thanked them for their participation, as well as for submitting the individual assessments.

2. Adoption of the draft agenda

There were no comments on the agenda, which was adopted without changes.

3. Acknowledgement of the 6th Task Force meeting minutes

Document: [6th Task Force meeting minutes](#)

There were no comments on the 6th Task Force meeting minutes, which were acknowledged.

4. Discussion on the assessments of the expressions of interest

Documents: Expressions of interest

Responses to the list of questions from the Task Force

4.1 Discussions on shortlisting and the TF's opinion

The EUA co-chair introduced the agenda point, noting that the answers provided by the applicants on the list of questions submitted by the Task Force proved both necessary and useful. He emphasised that the complexities evidenced in the answers from applicants would be relevant not only for the selection process, but also for defining the concept of the long-term Secretariat itself. He further proposed that the TF discuss all the applications going through each criteria.

The EUA Co-chair added that whereas the Terms of Reference for the TF expect a proposal from the group to the BFUG on a list of shortlisted applicants, as also reminded by the BFUG co-chairs, the TF may come to the conclusion that the BFUG itself should conduct the shortlisting. The Co-chairs, Czech Republic and Italy supported the idea that the TF should not propose a shortlisting itself, with EUA adding that a discussion on shortlisting before the BFUG online information session may lead to questioning the purpose of the session.

On the same topic, Romania and Italy recalled that the Call for applications adopted by the BFUG mentioned that the EHEA Secretariat would submit to the BFUG the applications, the reviews by the TF members and the opinion of the TF. In relation to the individual reviews, Italy, supported by Romania, suggested to send the individual reviews to the BFUG while anonymising the reviewers, while Czech Republic and EQAR proposed to agree in the TF on the interpretation of the scales within the traffic light system, since diverging practices of scoring emerged from the individual reviews.

Upon a question from Romania on how the opinion of the TF should be structured, the EUA co-chair suggested to include a table mapping the proposals and additionally include remarks on strengths and weaknesses.

4.2 Discussions on the comparative table for applications

In the beginning of the section, Romania requested that the Secretariat records in the minutes that they refrain from discussing the reviews or express any opinions on other applications. The EUA Co-chair mentioned that members should act in individual capacity and thus not be bound by the structure which nominated them.

Upon a suggestion from the Czech Republic that the Secretariat should provide an overview of salary calculations by the applicants based on the fictive UN salary grid sent by the TF, the Secretariat replied that such a comparison had been prepared for the meeting, analysing in relative terms the differences in gross salaries based on cost of living and the different percentages of net income as a result of gross salaries, according to the data provided by applicants.

The EUA co-chair introduced a table of comparisons that would help the TF better analyse the applications. The table would treat separately all the possible legal forms mentioned by the applicants. In this regard, the EUA Co-chair proposed going through all of them individually –

association, foundation, other legal formats. The Icelandic Co-chair suggested that the Secretariat finish the details in the table after the meeting.

The Czech Republic proposed to add in the table the preferred legal formats by the applicants, exemplifying by the fact that an association would not be the preferred legal form for the Czech Republic and Turkiye. The European Commission added that where such a preference was not clearly indicated, it should be mentioned as implicit, such as in the case of Cyprus for an association.

4.3.1 Association as a legal form

General remarks

The EUA Co-chair noted that all applicants bar Turkiye mentioned that establishing a non-profit association would be possible in their legal framework, adding that other similarities could include the use of national language for official documents.

Italy considered that the Turkish proposal of an international organisation should be nevertheless treated as an association, despite its' public law nature. Furthermore, he added that it would not be advisable to consider that private-law associations cannot be established in Turkiye, despite what the Turkish applicants proposed. In reply, the Czech representative highlighted that the TF should discuss what was proposed by applicants rather than what would be possible under national law.

In relation to the establishment of an association, the EUA co-chair emphasised that all applicants confirmed the possibility of establishing the Secretariat in due time, and no restrictions were identified in relation to the foreign membership of the association. Similar provisions were also found in relation to liability, with Germany additionally mentioning the importance of an insurance for the Board members. The Icelandic co-chair added that all applicants explained how the BFUG would exercise its control.

The EUA Co-chair raised the possibility of asking applicants about potential conditions for foreign ministries to join the association, bearing in mind possible foreign interference laws, and the Icelandic Co-chair added a potential question to applicants on whether their ministries can join the association themselves. From a practical standpoint, Czech Republic mentioned that in the Czech application a requirement of prior governmental approval was also underscored, which could be asked to other applicants as well.

Furthermore, Italy remarked that a question about the possibility of ministries joining an association should be asked to all BFUG members, with the Secretariat replying that most of them were already EQAR members which might serve as an indication.

The EUA co-chair pointed out that additional clarification would be required regarding the Czech remark of the necessity to have the ministry as a guarantor for the association, while he noted that in the Romanian case the answers clarified the possibility of establishing the association either by the ministry or through a HEI, the latter option being considered easier.

In relation to the minimum number of founders, the TF noted 20 for Cyprus, 7 for Germany, 5 for Romania and unspecified for the Czech Republic. On additional legal regulations, the Czech representative also raised the question of whether members would require physical presence in

the host country for every change of Statutes, with EQAR inquiring whether additional reporting and auditing duties could be prescribed by law, as it was the case in Belgium.

Governance

The EUA co-chair mentioned that all applicants included information about two required bodies – General Assembly and the Board, as well as their powers. However, not all applicants included information on whether online meetings could be held or not, how statutes could be changed, the flexibility of legal powers of the governing bodies and any legal requirements regarding the composition of the Board.

The Icelandic Co-chair emphasised that in associations the Board would be an executive body, whereas in the EHEA the BFUG Board does not have such powers and, additionally, it changes composition every six months. She suggested to transparently clarify to the BFUG the distinction between the two and invite the BFUG to discuss how the governance arrangement could work. The Secretariat and EQAR added that the TF should look into what powers could be restricted for the Board, with EQAR adding that the TF could propose a governance model and ask applicants whether it would be feasible in their legal environment.

EQAR emphasised that formally the employer/supervisor of the Secretariat would be the Board, even when it should be the BFUG. In this sense, he wondered how the Board could be kept accountable to the BFUG and the hierarchy maintained, calling for identifying flexible regulatory frameworks in this regard. In reply, the European Commission mentioned that the legal provisions for associations prescribe that the general assembly, thus the BFUG, is the final decision-maker, therefore the situation would not pose serious concerns. The Commission further pointed out to the possibility of having fixed Board members elected by the Board and/or having the Head of Secretariat as the head of the Board.

Czech Republic suggested that the document prepared for the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen should be short and articulate the further clarification points required or elements that the BFUG should consider. In reply, the EUA co-chair raised the option of creating a sub-group in the TF to work specifically on how the structures of the BFUG would align with those of an association.

4.3.2 Foundation as a legal form

The EUA co-chair inquired whether the TF should consider the foundation as principally possible, but less preferable than an association. Czech Republic and the Icelandic Co-chair agreed, highlighting that no applicant suggested the foundation as a preferred legal form. Czech Republic nevertheless considered that a foundation could be kept as a subsequent alternative, despite noting the difficulty of raising the minimum capital for a structure that did not exist.

Italy pointed out that the TF should not determine preferred legal formats since various elements should be considered beyond how easily they could be established. The Secretariat clarified that the TF already implicitly considered associations and foundations as in principle suitable since it asked all applicants about them, yet responses included themselves challenges for foundations. Romania considered that the TF should seek a balance and consider what was included in the expressions of interest, pointing out that establishing a Secretariat as an internal governmental body would have been easier for them as well.

4.3.3 Non-profit company as a legal form

The EUA co-chair informed that such an option was mentioned by Cyprus and Germany, yet it would entail several issues such as the status of the BFUG members as shareholders and less democratic procedures. The Icelandic co-chair expressed hesitation on whether BFUG members would be able or willing to join a company and the potential special approvals that BFUG members may require.

4.3.4 Within an administrative body

The Icelandic Co-chair pointed out that the Czech Republic explained how the governance of the BFUG could work in this model and their awareness of potential problems and how they could be mitigated. In contrast, the EUA Co-chair expressed reservations on the status of the Secretariat as part of a different legal entity since it would imply that the agency is the one legally responsible and accountable for the Secretariat's work. He added that the BFUG should be made aware that in this case there would be no legal entity for the Secretariat and considered that a delegation of services to the agency could also be possible in the case of an association established in the Czech Republic.

4.3.5 International organisation as a legal form

The EUA co-chair recalled that in the case of the Turkish application the establishment would be based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council on Higher Education and the BFUG. He noted that the BFUG would however not have a legal entity to commit to the MoU and also pointed out to insufficient clarity on whether the Statutes would be designed freely, whether the organisation would have members and what the internal procedures might be.

Hungary appreciated the flexibility of the Turkish law and also the existence of a special law tailored for this kind of international organisations. He contrasted the legal status with that proposed by Czech Republic, where the Secretariat would be part of an agency as a governmental structure, thus bound by the public administration laws.

Italy also highlighted that the special law guarantees the independence of the organisation and the role of the President of the Republic would only relate to the creation of the organisation through a decree, pursuant to the law which would then apply to the organisation. In reply, EQAR mentioned that the application did not clarify how easily or through what procedure the decree could be withdrawn, since it would be an unipersonal decision. On the same topic, the EUA Co-chair contrasted such an engagement with that of the Czech ministry in the case of an association in Czech Republic, where the involvement would be regulated by law.

4.4 Sustainability

Discussion started with a focus on Cyprus, with Italy, the Commission and the Icelandic Co-chair pointing out that despite a detailed budget, the application was not sufficiently concrete in terms of commitments of support, approaching the establishment from an external perspective and through facilitating the processes during set up.

Czech Republic also highlighted that some applications mentioned the duration and type of support offered to be further detailed in a contract, yet such a contract could be signed with a legal entity only after the Secretariat would be established. Supported by the EUA co-chair, he

further suggested that the fictive salaries used as a comparison by the TF would not be circulated at this stage to the BFUG. In this sense, he considered they might be confusing for members and alternatively suggested that the TF propose estimates for staff members itself.

Supported by Italy, Romania considered that all the work of the TF should be circulated to BFUG members to ensure transparency, in the case of salaries explaining their fictive nature. Romania also added that for the same reason anonymous individual reviews should be circulated as well.

In reply, the Icelandic co-chair emphasised that what would be relevant for the BFUG is to show the percentage of net income and employer contributions rather than the staff costs themselves, which were fictional. The Secretariat added that the calculations prepared by the Secretariat to the TF regarding the cost of living could also be made available even if the TF would not circulate the gross totals.

4.5 Accessibility

The EUA Co-chair emphasised that travel to and from the location would be primarily relevant for the EHEA Secretariat itself. The Icelandic Co-chair noticed that out of the applicants two are non-Schengen countries, while the European Commission suggested to use the ranking from the International Air Transport Association for an objective comparison.

4.6 In-kind support

The TF noted that relevant difference between applications on the in-kind services could be observed, with Czech Republic, Romania and Turkiye mentioning financial support and Germany referencing infrastructure support from DAAD, yet also including rent in the proposed budget. The Czech Republic added that some operational costs were missing from the budgets, for example on equipment.

5. Preparation of the online BFUG information session

The Secretariat gave updates on the situation of registered BFUG members. The Czech Republic suggested to start with an introduction explaining the status quo and first impressions, as well as the purpose of the meeting.

The EUA co-chair suggested to inform applicants that foundations were seen as more difficult to establish and posing more complexities than associations, as well as clarify to BFUG members that discussions would focus on the hosting arrangements and not the concept or budget of the Secretariat. He also suggested that the BFUG members receive the additional answers submitted by the applicants before the meeting, yet without the answers to the staff costs.

6. Preparation for the Bologna Follow-Up Group Board and Bologna Follow-Up Group meetings

The EUA Co-chair introduced the point and suggested that at the BFUG Board meeting in Vaduz the TF would submit a short report on the state of play and the process to be conducted in Copenhagen regarding the hosting arrangement and discussion on governance and financing, without any reviews distributed at the Board meeting. Regarding the format of the review to be presented at the BFUG meeting, he suggested to discuss it at a future TF meeting. In the case of not proposing any shortlisting for the BFUG, the TF should further suggest that an opinion polling be conducted in the BFUG in order to arrive at a shortlist of two or three.

Iceland suggested that the Secretariat puts forward suggestions on how such a polling could be conducted, with the outcome that each BFUG members shows their preference.

Italy recalled their position in the BFUG that a decision on the long-term Secretariat should be coupled with the decision on how the financing of the Secretariat would be ensured, adding that the discussion should not be dissociated from the hosting arrangement since some applicants may be willing to offer a more consistent financial support. The EUA co-chair replied by also recalling that the hosts should not be expected to cover the costs for the Secretariat themselves.

Supported by the European Commission, Romania considered that if the TF arrives to the conclusion of not doing a shortlisting proposal, the analysis of the assessment scales adopted in the Call for applications should nevertheless be presented. Considering the different views on the application of the assessment scale, the EUA Co-chair and the Czech Republic suggested to prepare the analysis jointly in the TF, together with a summary on lessons and main overviews. The European Commission considered that circulating weighted averages of evaluations for information purposes may be useful, with the EUA co-chair and Czech Republic reflecting that the reviews could be either added as an anonymised annex or summarised. Upon a question on the different relevance of the criteria, the Secretariat highlighted that the Call adopted by the BFUG included percentages associated to each criteria.

Iceland reiterated that in order to keep ownership with the BFUG, the TF should clarify the crucial issues and help BFUG members arrive at their own views on the applications. The Czech Republic added that in this case a table with strengths and weaknesses for each application on each criteria could be more useful than the 4-scale scores.

The EUA Co-chair concluded that the TF would provide one summary of strengths and weaknesses and one summary of the assessments, asking the BFUG members to do the shortlisting themselves. He added that the TF should also prepare an additional paper on governance and finances for the BFUG meeting, with the Icelandic co-chair suggesting to obtain a slot on Day 2 of the BFUG meeting as well. The TF would start with the general discussion, followed by the discussion on the hosting arrangements, with the beginning of Day 2 focusing on future next steps.

7. Updates from the supporting Erasmus+ project

The Czech Republic informed members that the project would work in Spring 2026 on the feasibility study supporting the go/no-go decision and after the BFUG meeting in Cyprus would focus on helping the selected host build the infrastructure, establish procedures, support the selection process for the Head of Secretariat, as well as offer capacity building for the new staff.

8. Any other business (AOB)

The Task Force agreed on the dates for the next two meeting, taking place online: 29th of October 2025 and 21st of November 2025. No other AOB was raised.