Minutes of the C BFUG Board meeting

29th of September 2026

Podgorica, Montenegro

List of participants

Country/Organisation	Name	Last Name
Cyprus, outgoing BFUG Co-chair	Kyriacos	Charalambous
EHEA Secretariat (Head)	Horia Serban	Onita
EHEA Secretariat	Lilia	Parhomenco
EHEA Secretariat	Oana Alexandra	Tintar
ESU, Drafting Committee Co-chair	Daciana	Pop
EUA, Co-chair of the Task force on establishing the long-term EHEA Secretariat	Michael	Gaebel
EURASHE	Jakub	Grodecki
European Commission	Kinga	Szuly
Ireland, BFUG Co-chair	Siobhan	Sleeman
Ireland	Padraig	Hennigan
Lithuania, incoming BFUG Co-chair	Neda	Zutautaite
Montenegro, BFUG Co-chair	Dragana	Cetkovic
Montenegro	Tatjana	Calasan
Montenegro	Aleksandra	Gogic
Montenegro	Milica	Kavedzic
North Macedonia, incoming BFUG Co-chair	Borcho	Aleksov
Norway, outgoing BFUG Co-chair	Julie	Park
Romania, BFUG Vice-chair	Luminița	Matei
WG on Monitoring (Austria)	Helga	Posset
WG on Fundamental Values (Romania)	Cezar Mihai	Haj
WG on Internationalisation and Mobility (The Netherlands)	Arthur	Belle
CG on Global Policy Dialogue (Italy)	Elisa	Petrucci
Task Force on the Future of Bologna (Germany)	Michaela	Boehme
Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (EUA)	Maria	Kelo

Meeting starts at 08:56 CEST

1. Welcome and introduction

1.1. Welcome and Introduction by Ms. Anđela Jakšić Stojanović, Minister for Education, Science and Innovation of Montenegro

The Montenegrin BFUG Co-chair welcomed participants to the BFUG Board meeting and gave the floor to the Montenegrin Minister for Education, Science and Innovation. The Montenegrin Minister welcomed everyone and highlighted the special occasion of the 100th BFUG Board meeting. She pointed out the role of the Bologna Process in achieving more transparent, inclusive and connected higher education systems which translate into tangible improvements. The

minister congratulated the BFUG Board members for their activity, which led to an extensive agenda for the Board meeting, and thanked the EHEA Secretariat for their support.

1.2. Welcome by the BFUG Co-chairs (Ireland and Montenegro)

The Irish BFUG Co-chair thanked the Montenegrin hosts for their hospitality and excellent organisation of the meeting and looked forward to welcoming Board members at the upcoming BFUG meeting in Dublin.

1.3. Welcome by the BFUG Vice-chair (Romania)

The BFUG Vice-chair thanked the hosts and emphasised the role of the Bologna Process in strengthening trust between higher education systems

1.4. Information from the outgoing BFUG Co-chairs (Cyprus and Norway)

Documents: Minutes of the BFUG XCVIII Board meeting (Oslo)

The Norwegian outgoing BFUG Co-chair expressed thanks to the Cypriot colleagues and the EHEA Secretariat and recalled key activities from their co-chairmanship, including the agreement on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat and discussions on the ECTS User's Guide and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

The Cypriot outgoing BFUG Co-chairs shared regrets for the unfortunate situation requiring that the BFUG meeting hosted by Cyprus moved in an online format. He thanked the Norwegian colleagues and the EHEA Secretariat for the collaboration and pointed out key discussions during the BFUG meeting, including on the long-term Secretariat, the launch of the new EHEA website, the discussions on the ECTS User's Guide and ESG as well as the set-up of the Drafting Committee for the Iași-Chișinău Communiqué.

2. Adoption of the agenda

Documents: Agenda of the meeting
BFUG Board C All documents

The Montenegrin BFUG Co-chair concluded that the BFUG Board meeting agenda was adopted without any changes.

09:20 – 10:00 **3. Information from EHEA Secretariat**

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_3_1_EHEA_Secretariat_Presentation_26.09.2026
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_3_2_Structure_for_final_reports
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_3_3_Call for 2030 Ministerial Conference hosts
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_3_4_Study-on-Bologna-impact-and-future-trends_Draft_11.09.2026
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_3_5_Study-on-Bologna-impact-and-future trends_Draft_Key-messages_11.09.2026

The Head of Secretariat thanked the hosts, the current and outgoing Co-chairs, the Board members and the Secretariat team. He gave updates on the activity of the Secretariat since the last BFUG meeting, starting with the support for the BFUG working structures, particularly in planning, organising and the follow-up of meetings. He pointed out that out of the 15 meetings of the working structures ('WS') organised since the XCIX BFUG meeting, six had been in-person and out of those three were organised by the EHEA Secretariat itself in Bucharest. To gather feedback and improve its activity, the EHEA Secretariat sent a survey to the co-chairs of the BFUG working structures, with the results showing a high degree of satisfaction with the support offered by the Secretariat. Other activities by the Secretariat included the support in preparing the first draft of the Communiqué, *preparing a survey for the BFUG on priorities for the Communiqué* and to contribute to the work of the Task Force on the Future of Bologna, liaising with BFUG members for the reports of the WG on Monitoring and WG on Fundamental Values, and preparing the invitations to the Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum. The Secretariat further presented the Call for the 2030 hosts and the Structure for the Final Reports of the working structures and informed about the successful organisation of the Conference 'The Future of Higher Education: Sharing knowledge and supporting implementation for a stronger Bologna Process', organised in Bucharest between 16-17 September, in dual-track format with the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, and which gathered more than 100 participants from over 38 countries. Concurrently, the Secretariat prepared a study *on Bologna impact and future trends as an evidence-based input for the conference and as a tool that would support the discussions of the Drafting Committee and the Task Force on the Future of Bologna.*

EUA and the Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair congratulated the Secretariat and the Romanian colleagues at UEFISCDI for the very successful Conferences organised in Romania. EUA further asked how the results of the Conference and the study could feed into the discussions in Dublin, with the Secretariat replying that a common session was envisaged with the Task Force on the Future of Bologna that would bring together the work of the Task Force, the results of the Conference, the study and the results of the BFUG survey prepared by the Secretariat.

4. Updates on the organisation of the Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_4_Updates_Ministerial_Conference_and_GPF

The BFUG Vice-chair informed that invitations to the EHEA members, consultative members and partners have already been sent, while those for the Global Policy Forum guests would follow shortly. They also informed that the diplomatic services would also be used in order to reach global partners and highlighted that the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is looking into offering financial support for certain non-EHEA countries to attend the GPF. In order to prepare a draft agenda for the BFUG meeting in Dublin, the Vice-chair kindly asked for the Board's input in structuring the agenda, including the methodology – the approach towards plenary sessions, parallel groups, inviting external experts or not), and the topics to be addressed. They exemplified that one of the Romanian proposals would include a panel on digitalisation and AI with representatives from ministries, stakeholders and companies, which was supported by EUA and

ESU. The BFUG Vice-chair added that they would also envisage a contribution in the Ministerial Conference from the European University Institute. EUA suggested to include both plenary and breakout sessions and to avoid a demarcation line on policy discussions between participants at the Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum. He pointed out that - beyond the topics- particular importance should be given to who is invited to speak on each topic and from what angle. EUA suggested meetings where ministers discuss on stage together with wider sector representatives.

ESU suggested to include a session on the consultative members' perspective for the Future of Bologna, and informed that they would submit a proposal for a side event to present the Bologna with Student Eyes, EUA Trends and other publications. The Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair proposed to structure the agenda in line with the achievements of the current working period while also ensuring a future-oriented approach. She considered that the recommendations included in the draft study submitted by the Secretariat represents a useful guide for thinking about potential sessions. The Italian CG GPD Co-chair pointed out that, alongside the study, due consideration should be given to the BFUG survey, the outcomes of the TF on the FoB and all the BFUG working structures working on future-looking perspectives.

The Head of Secretariat pointed out the need to design a system of collecting input from BFUG members on topics that their ministers would like to speak about, which might be a way to incentivise their participation and to ensure a prioritisation. On another note, ESU reminded that all delegations are expected to include a student representative into the delegation and that their participation is covered financially. The Vice-chair confirmed that accommodation for student representatives would be covered by the hosts.

5. Reporting from the BFUG working structures

5.1 WG on Monitoring (20 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.1_WG_Monitoring_Presentation_23.09.2026

The Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group and presented the ongoing timeline. She informed about the new Eurydice Co-chair and reported on the successful inclusion of all EHEA countries in the 2027 Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR). She further confirmed that a first draft of the BPIR would be submitted in time for the upcoming BFUG meeting in Dublin. The Austrian WG Co-chair added that the narrative texts for the chapters had been submitted to the editor and that the next WG meeting, scheduled for October 2026, would also kick-start discussions about the next work programme. Finally, she pointed out that feedback on the first draft BPIR would be expected from BFUG members by the 14th of December. There were no comments or questions from the BFUG Board members.

5.2 WG on Fundamental Values (25 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.2_WG_FV_Presentation_24.09.2026

The Romanian WG on Fundamental Values Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group and recalled the mandate given by ministers to conduct the first monitoring of the implementation

of the six fundamental values. He pointed out that the monitoring covered the protection, promotion, and practice of the values across all EHEA higher education systems and thanked the WG on Monitoring for ensuring synergies and avoiding duplication in data collection. The Romanian WG Co-chair added that the de jure monitoring used traffic light indicators while the de facto part was fully narrative. He explained the methodology for collecting the evidence, including surveys to public authorities, stakeholders and the academic communities, and explained the rules used for data validation and assessment. The presentation further included details about the broad range of stakeholders that engaged with the process, including some which had not been targeted before such as administrative staff, doctoral candidates and early career academics. Looking at the results, he pointed out that threats to academic freedom and institutional autonomy were highly present in the responses, as well as funding's impact towards fundamental values. Comparatively, he emphasised that most important differences were between the content of legislation covering fundamental values, not whether they legislated or not, and that most promotion measures covering fundamental values were actually a by-product of other initiatives. Finally, he informed that the report would be ready for the BFUG meeting in Dublin and that the WG on FV would also plan to organise a side event at the Ministerial Conference.

Upon a question from the European Commission on how they treated developments for Hungary, the Romanian WG Co-chair clarified that the cut-off reference date was 30 June 2026 and as such they took into account developments up until this date, with potential changes mentioned in the outlook section. The European Commission further informed that the European Research Area Act, planned to be adopted soon, would include a regulation about freedom of scientific research.

Upon questions from EUA, the Romanian WG Co-chair replied that early career researchers, administrative staff and researchers should be more directly targeted through their respective organisations in the next round of monitoring. The Romanian WG Co-chair welcomed contributions from EUA and ESU publications feeding into the report on fundamental values to the extent to which they cover de jure and de facto developments rather than perceptions.

Finally, EUA asked how could the BFUG follow up on the results of the report beyond conducting a new survey in the next cycle but rather proposing activities promoting fundamental values. The Romanian WG Co-chair highlighted that the next WG meeting would discuss proposals for the next cycle and that some recommendations have already been sent to the Drafting Committee. The WG would also submit shorter materials aimed at promoting fundamental values apart from the monitoring report.

5.3 WG on Internationalisation and Mobility (25 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.3_1_Draft_3_Action_Plan_on_IM
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.3_2_Presentation_23.09.2026

The Dutch WG on Internationalisation and Mobility Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group and presented the Draft 3 of the Action Plan on IM. He pointed out that particular dilemmas had been discussed during the BFUG held online in March 2026, based on a Concept Paper prepared by the WG, in order to receive guidance from the BFUG. The Dutch WG Co-chair gave an outline of the Action Plan, which included an introduction, followed by a section about

the strategic vision of internationalisation and mobility and then nine commitments which were thereafter expanded in actions to operationalise them. The Action Plan took as its' starting point the Leuven target of 20% mobile graduates and the commitment in the Rome Communiqué that all learners should acquire international and intercultural competencies and considered the geopolitical developments in the positioning of the new EHEA strategic approach for IM. The Dutch WG Co-chair further emphasised that the Action Plan advocates for openness in the global cooperation in higher education, while retaining a values-based engagement. Finally, the document identifies barriers to mobility, proposes recommendations to support more inclusive, balanced and green mobility and highlights the role of data collection in moving to evidence-informed policy making on the topic. The Dutch WG Co-chair ended with highlighting the added value of the EC's report on balanced mobility1 Study on balanced and inclusive learning mobility in the context of the European Education Area and the new higher education mobiliy target.

ESU considered that the socio-economic barriers to mobility should be tackled more directly in the Action Plan and anticipated comments that they would submit at the upcoming WG meeting. The Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair asked for more concrete recommendations and suggested to consider the evidence from Eurostudent when analysing financial barriers to mobility, which also show that many students have a lack of aspiration to be mobile. In reply, the Dutch WG Co-chair pointed out that the Action Plan attempts to overcome cultural barriers by enticing mobility while promoting alternative internationalisation experiences.

The European Commission welcomed the reference to the report on balanced mobility and pointed out to the difficulty of additional data collection in light of the reporting burden perceived by countries. The EC representative invited proposals on how the report could be followed-up in terms of data collection, potentially even through Eurostudent and Eurograduate. In relation with the Action Plan, the Commission further suggested to better distinguish between credit and degree mobility, since the attitudes of countries can differ between the two. Finally, EURASHE proposed to better integrate in the Plan the geographical disbalance and to promote mobility for remote areas and regions.

5.4 CG on Global Policy Dialogue (20 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.4_CG-GPD_Global_Policy_Statement
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.4_CG-GPD_2030 Roadmap for international cooperation
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.4_CG_GPD_3_Presentation_24.09

The Italian CG GPD Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group, starting with the results of the CG GPD meeting in Rome, which included a PLA on lifelong learning and micro-credentials and was open to international partners. She informed that the upcoming CG GPD meeting would be organised by UNESCO in Paris in December 2026 and would include a PLA covering the right to education, recognition and fundamental values. She presented the two documents submitted by the group, starting with the Global Policy Forum Statement. Apart from discussions in the CG

1 Study on balanced and inclusive learning mobility in the context of the European Education Area and the new higher education mobiliy target

GPD and the Drafting Group for the Statement, the Italian CG GPD Co-chair added that one consultation had been organised and a second one is envisaged with representatives of all macro-regions. For the second consultation, all those having received an invitation for the Global Policy Forum would be invited, together with representatives who participated in the first round of consultations. Regarding the Statement, she presented the structure composed of an introduction, vision, actions and outlook. For the actions, she pointed out that they stem from the key topics discussed by the CG GPD that represent concrete areas of cooperation and priority commitments, such as quality assurance, recognition, mobility, lifelong learning, and the right to education. Some issues of emphasis include the role of higher education institutions as drivers of cooperation and innovation, the ethical digital transformation and AI and the enhanced mechanism for cooperation among macro-regions. The CG GPD Co-chair then presented the EHEA Roadmap for international cooperation for 2030 and beyond, which followed the same consultation process as the Statement and aims to identify policy areas and future trajectories to improve global cooperation in higher education, following up on the last strategy on the global dimension of the EHEA which was issued in London in 2007. She pointed out that the document had been prepared in consultation with CG GPD members and representatives of the different macro-regions. Building on the work carried out during the current mandate, the document proposes a new strategy for the global dimension, considering that the previous strategy dates back to 2007. The document proposes a joint vision and six areas of priority under the pillars 'co-creation and community building' and 'human-centred solidarity and digital transformation'.

The European Commission asked whether there was an avenue to restart discussions on offering more closer and structured cooperation models for countries which might be interested in cooperating with the Bologna Process, such as Canada. The Italian CG Co-chair mentioned that the desire to better structure the cooperation with non-EHEA partners was included in the Statement, and that the Roadmap also proposed a governance board to manage the relation between EHEA and non-EHEA stakeholders. The EHEA Secretariat supported the European Commission's proposal and mentioned that Uzbekistan also contacted the Secretariat to identify how to better seek alignment with the Bologna Process. He pointed out that the Communique is the document where this proposal should materialise and explained that the current Draft 0.1 already hints into this direction but in a generic language.

EUA supported the documents but considered them quite long and extensive, covering the whole broad range of activities already done within the EHEA. They suggested prioritising certain partners, topics and regions in consideration of the limited resources and suggested to better explain what actors would be engaged in the institution-to-institution cooperation and how could that be brought forward. He further proposed referring to the London Strategy as a 'Bologna in global setting' rather than the subtitle 'the external dimension of the Bologna Process'.

The EHEA Secretariat suggested to organise a coordination meeting between the co-chairs of the Drafting Committee and of the GPF Statement, after the BFUG meeting in Dublin, in order to align terminology and the 'voice' of the documents. The Dutch WG on IM Co-chair supported the language concerning international openness and considered it aligned with the approach of their WG. He was however concerned with referencing higher education as a human right, which could imply that all individuals should complete higher education or that higher education is superior to other education sectors. ESU and the Italian CG Co-chair disagreed and suggested retaining the sentence, further arguing that higher education as a human right, as already

conceptualised in international agreements, implies removing barriers to access and not that everyone would be expected have a higher education degree. EUA suggested to reformulate into 'education, including higher education, as a human right'. He further suggested to look into synergies between the documents produced by the WG on IM and the CG on GPD.

5. Reporting from the BFUG working structures (continuation)

5.5 TF on the Future of Bologna (15 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.5_TF_FoB_Presentation_26.09

The German TF on the Future of Bologna Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group and started by reporting on the 5th TF meeting which had taken place in Bucharest on the 18th of September. She pointed out that the TF discussed the outcomes of the Conferences and particularly the proposals from the background study on fostering implementation and proposing potential policy recommendations. The TF agreed that the overarching priorities include artificial intelligence, lifelong learning, the social dimension, the interconnectedness with ERA and VET, and questions of governance and ownership. Measures discussed by the TF included the modernisation of existing Bologna tools, strengthened monitoring and improving the impact of national action plans. She further informed about the online debate that would be organised with the BFUG on the 6th of October on EHEA-ERA interconnectedness. The German TF Co-chair pointed out that their planned contribution for the BFUG meeting in Dublin included a session on future priorities, to be organised in collaboration with the EHEA Secretariat which would submit the report of the Conference organised in Bucharest and the results of the BFUG survey. The session would bring together and synthetise the debates organised by the TF so far, including the one planned for the 6th of October, and would represent a decisive step towards the contribution of the TF to the Communiqué. Ireland thanked for the opportunity to attend the TF meeting and looked forward to the debate in Dublin discussing both a forward-looking vision and ideas for better implementation.

5.6 Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (15 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.6_BICG_Presentation_23.09.2026

The EUA BICG Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group and started by informing about the BICG meeting held in June, where the BICG started discussing their report and the contribution to the Communiqué. She pointed out that the work of the TPGs and their supporting projects had been on track. Regarding their future recommendations, one strand includes the TPG system and its coordination, the type of participation into groups, the liaison with the national implementation levels and the effectiveness of different activities, such as PLAs, for the various outcomes. Another topic included the difference between projects and core TPG activity and how projects and thematic contributions to the future priorities of TPGs. For example, the BICG would view flexible learning as an emerging cross-cutting theme that might require future development. The BICG also looked at the link between the national action plans and the TPG work plans, proposing a better timing between the two. Furthermore, the BICG would propose better communication to clarify the TPG and project outputs by compiling publications and good practice and distinguishing between materials adopted by ministers, guidance endorsed by the

BFUG and other TPG/project outputs. She suggested that the new Secretariat would prepare a database of materials, underlining their different status. Finally, she pointed out that in their next meeting in October in Sofia the BICG would consolidate their report and input to the Communiqué and hold a thematic working session on flexible learning paths and flexible learning.

EURASHE mentioned that a coordination meeting on flexibility and lifelong learning was held with the TPGs and that a compendium of good practices on lifelong learning would be published in the framework of the BP4LnT project, which would focus on both system-level and institutional perspectives. He mentioned as opportunities the seminar on lifelong learning organised back-to-back with the BFUG, as well as the possibility to hold additional interviews with countries that are interested in sharing their practices.

5.7 Task Force on establishing the long-term EHEA Secretariat (30 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.7_1_TF_LTS_Draft-Statutes_24.09
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.7_2_TF_LTS_Roadmap_23.09
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.7_3_TF_LTS_Financial-Model_23.09
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_5.7_4_TF_LTS_Presentation_26.09

The EUA TF Co-chair gave updates on behalf of the group and started by recalling the decision of the BFUG taken in March to move forward with establishing a long-term Secretariat in Romania. He pointed out that three countries stepped forward to found the Secretariat association, namely Romania, Austria and Norway, with Ireland still considering it. In relation to the location, two higher education institutions offered to host the Secretariat in Bucharest, with a decision expected to be taken by the Romanian Ministry of Education in October. He recalled that on the 30th of June the TF organised an information session with the BFUG on the finance and membership fees for the association.

In preparation for the BFUG meeting in Dublin, the TF elaborated a first draft of the Statutes, with the EUA TF Co-chair mentioning that they were aligned as much as possible with the existing EHEA and BFUG Rules of Procedure. He pointed out that the expectation was that all BFUG members would join the association, thus aligning the General Assembly of the association with the BFUG. It was emphasised that the goal of the association would be to offer operational support for the BFUG and the EHEA, following the decisions of the BFUG and without any political role.

In this sense, the TF suggested that the meetings of the General Assembly take place within or back-to-back with the BFUG meetings. In order to further ensure the relationship with the BFUG, the Statutes propose membership categories which resemble as much as possible the BFUG membership, however with a new category of observer status for BFUG members which cannot legally join the association but would still like to be involved. The EUA TF Co-chair highlighted that such a status would be decided by the General Assembly and be contingent on a financial contribution as well.

Apart from the General Assembly, the second governance body of the association would be a Steering Committee, which the TF proposed to be composed of five individuals, out of which three representatives of full members appointed by the GA, one representative of the country hosting the next Ministerial Conference and one representative of consultative members. The EUA TF Co-chair added that the Steering Committee was required by the Romanian legislation and that the role would be an ancillary one limited to overseeing the Secretariat's work without any content or policy input. Furthermore, he noted that the BFUG Board would not be able to take over this task as it had a high turnover.

Another issue proposed by the TF was discussing the name of the association, with suggestions to be put forward for the BFUG meeting in Dublin.

He added that the TF also started working on the recruitment of the Head of Secretariat, with documents to be prepared for the BFUG meeting in Dublin. The EUA TF Co-chair proposed that the vacancy note be issued after the BFUG meeting in Dublin, with a first deadline for applications on the 5th of January, to be extended if necessary. He suggested that the TF supported by the Czech Agency conducts a compliance check and a first review of the applications and then submit them with scores and comments to a Selection Panel to be appointed by the BFUG. Subsequently, the Selection Panel would select 8-12 candidates for online interviews and up to five candidates for in person interview in March, with one to three candidates submitted to the BFUG for a decision in April 2027. For the composition of the Selection Panel, the TF Co-chairs proposed seven members comprised of 4 BFUG representatives, one representative from consultative members and two externals.

On funding, the TF co-chairs had an exchange with the EC and the EACEA to ensure that funding would be smoothly available once the new Secretariat's mandate starts, with information to be given to the BFUG in the online session planned for the 6th of October. He pointed out that the EHEA call would be published on the 16th of December 2026, with the deadline for proposals on the 15th of July 2027 and grant agreements signed by the end of 2027. In this sense, since the TF proposes that the Head of Secretariat would be hired only in April and they might not start work immediately, he suggested that the TF develops the grant application. The EUA TF Co-chair also added that during exchanges with EACEA, they suggested the possibility to have small grants of maximum 60.000 EUR awarded by the Secretariat as a third-party support for the work of the EHEA working structures and other urgent tasks for the BFUG work plan.

The presentation then included a reminder on the expected decisions at the BFUG meeting in Dublin, including the draft Statutes, the declaration of intent from Romania outlining their commitment, the contract with the higher education institution, the Call for the Head of Secretariat, including assessment criteria and profile, and the Selection Panel. The EUA TF Co-chair added that a provisional Steering Committee would need to be established, with the suggestion to ask the three founding members to act in that role together with one additional full member and consultative member. He pointed out that the provisional SC could remain in place until the spring or the autumn BFUG.

The Montenegrin BFUG Co-chair opened the floor for questions and comments.

On the Statutes, the European Commission reiterated the need to ensure that the steering and strategic decisions remain in the hand of the BFUG, as indicated in the draft, which was also the requirement based on which the BFUG decided to establish a long-term Secretariat. The EC

shared the complexity of having the European Commission engaged as a member of the association, stating that even an observer status would require a complicated procedure and an agreement from the College of Commissioners, with the EC lawyers currently looking into how the EC could participate, even in the case of a unilateral reference in the Statutes that the EC has the right to participate in all structures.

The Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair asked about how the Steering Committee and the Selection Panel would be established, whether there were rules of procedure for that as well, if the proposal would be submitted by the 6th of October and who would write the job description for the Head of Secretariat. The EUA TF Co-chair answered that the Steering Committee would be proposed in and then agreed by the BFUG and appointed by the GA, adding that the SC would have little work to do since the Secretariat would not be established yet.

Romania mentioned that the Statutes should fully comply with the decisions taken by the BFUG and raised concerns that the competencies proposed for the Steering Committee may deviate from the mandate received from the BFUG. Romania considered that the Steering Committee as proposed would add a new layer of governance for the Secretariat, while the BFUG decided to create an association as a legal vehicle for the Secretariat without a new governance level. She pointed out that such a change of the EHEA's architecture should require changing the Rules of Procedure. Romania emphasised that the application submitted by them, selected by the BFUG, and also in line with what most applicants proposed, was that the BFUG Board members would sit in the Steering Committee and implement the BFUG decisions. Furthermore, Romania emphasised that the draft Statutes were not verified by their legal department yet since they waited for the greenlight from the TF in this regard. In relation to the Head of Secretariat, Romania considered that through the competencies introduced for the Steering Committee it might induce the idea that the Head of Secretariat is ultimately accountable to the Steering Committee, not to the BFUG, the former not being a body within the EHEA Rules of Procedure. She finalised by stating that as ministry representatives they have to be careful not to create additional administrative layers and that she cannot go to the political leadership of the ministry with proposals that go against prior decisions.

The incoming Lithuanian BFUG Co-chair asked whether the TF considered to combine the Steering Committee with the BFUG Board and the reasons not to suggest this. She also proposed to discuss how to better integrate it in the BFUG's governance structures and emphasised the need to ensure that Romania would find the proposed solution understandable and in line with their legislative context. In response, the EUA TF Co-chair emphasised that the practical distinction between the association and the BFUG would be limited since the BFUG members would be members of the association's general assembly. Furthermore, he pointed out that the Statutes do not overrule the EHEA Rules of Procedure which determine the accountability of the Head of Secretariat, and that a Steering Committee is required by Romanian law. He added that since the BFUG meeting in March 2026 the TF indicated that they wouldn't consider the BFUG Board appropriate for this due to the high turnover and also because a small group of people was needed to look into the technical matters of the Secretariat. The EUA TF Co-chair expressed their confidence that once the structures are set up the distinction would fade in practice.

Ireland highlighted that the governance arrangements are critically important, particularly ensuring that the lines of accountability are clear and that members are satisfied with the

solution. She acknowledged the potential risk following the creation of additional structures and suggested to explore whether a subcommittee of the BFUG Board would not be an alternative.

In relation to the General Assembly, the Italian CG GPD Co-chair asked to what extent reducing the distance between the BFUG and the General Assembly might jeopardise the independence of the GA and ensuring that it does not address any political matters, and to what extent keeping this distance does not require an additional layer of governance. In reply, the EUA TF Co-chair pointed out that the issues to be discussed by the BFUG and by the General Assembly were different, yet all should be discussed first before being brought to the GA. He further added that the Statutes aimed to make it very clear that the BFUG would have a monopoly on policy, and that the TF would look into how to enhance the nexus between the BFUG Board and the Steering Committee, yet recalled the fact that the only permanent members of the Board are the BFUG Vice-chair and the consultative members and that the BFUG Board does not have a legal status that would be appropriate to reference in the Statutes of another, independent legal entity.

Supported by Romania, Ireland clarified that the arrangement should make it clear that the Secretariat is receiving strategic guidance from the BFUG and its Board, rather than from the Steering Committee, and that the Steering Committee, if a subcommittee of the BFUG Board, could propose recommendations to the BFUG Board on guiding the Secretariat's work at an operational level. The Italian CG GPD Co-chair emphasised that a multiplication of entities would complicate decision-making and would make it unclear for the Secretariat to whom they are responsible. In the same vein, the Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair pointed out that it was still unclear what the role of the SC in relation to the BFUG and the Board was. She pointed out that the BFUG representatives engaged in different working structures have more connection to the Secretariat's work and tensions might arise if the SC members are not very closely connected with the BFUG or the BFUG Board.

The Romanian WG on FV Co-chair added that since the TF proposed to have the GA as back-to-back with the BFUG meeting, in a similar fashion the Steering Committee could take place back-to-back with the BFUG Board meetings, arguing that in this way both the accountability and the efficiency of meetings are maintained. In reply, the EUA TF Co-chair pointed out that one representative of the SC could attend and report to the BFUG Board. Furthermore, the EUA BICG Co-chair added that such an extensive body as the BFUG Board would not be able to adequately appraise the Head of Secretariat, who would be unwilling to share their situation with so many people, so a smaller number of people should act as managers of the Head of Secretariat. Furthermore, since the GA would not be able to take decisions such as buying furniture, they would need to be taken by the SC.

On the Call for the Head of Secretariat, Romania pointed out that the proposal to establish the Selection Panel and its composition had not been discussed in the TF prior to being submitted to the BFUG Board. Romania further recalled that the BFUG Board should have a final say on the proposal to the BFUG regarding the selection of the Head of Secretariat. The Romanian WG on FV Co-chair considered that the general approach of suggesting taking responsibilities away from the BFUG Board which is a governance body in the Rules of Procedure was a mistake.

On funding, the Commission shared that 5 million EUR is available for the EHEA call, yet the legal requirements impose that the call is launched in 2026 and the contracts be signed by the

end of 2027. The EC pointed out that this means that applications should be submitted before the adoption of the BFUG work programme, including the co-chairmanship roles. As a buffer for those working structures unable to apply, the EC considered the alternative of giving some funds to the new Secretariat to act as an implementing body. The Commission presented advantages and risks of both options and proposed a discussion in the BFUG to better understand how to conduct the process.

Supported by the Italian CG GPD Co-chair, the Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair further emphasised that if the Secretariat were given funds from the Commission to disburse, a policy decision would be unavoidable. Similarly, the Dutch WG on IM Co-chair asked which organisations would be eligible for the small grants and for what type of funding, as well as how conflict of interest would be avoided and undue influence on the operation of the Secretariat.

The Italian CG GPD Co-chair considered that financing the activity through small grants would be fragmented and difficult to provide in a coherent way towards an overall objective. Furthermore, they asked whether the timing of the Call would imply that the working structures would not be in a position to be supported anymore. In reply, the European Commission pointed out that the structures for the next cycle could be discussed, albeit informally, during the first months of the next year, when the priorities from the Communique would also be agreed on. In this sense, the risk factor would be whether countries would apply to lead projects if the decisions on co-chairing would not be taken formally yet. The Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair considered the risk of underspending limited and that countries would nevertheless apply for the projects since they have realised that the focus of call should be on shared implementation rather than individual initiatives. The Head of Secretariat suggested to coordinate with the current and incoming BFUG Co-chairs and propose a timeline regarding the discussion of the work programme, even if informally, as well as countries interested in co-chairing. He pointed out that such an exercise also took place in 2015, when the work programme was discussed before the Yerevan Conference even if only formally adopted afterwards. He added that in this way at the BFUG meeting in Greece in September 2027 the BFUG could already agree on ToRs for the working structures, thus avoiding the over six months of interregnum between two cycles and the overlap between projects. The Italian CG GPD Co-chair considered it important to anticipate the decision on co-chairing so that countries have an official commitment when applying.

The EUA TF Co-chair thanked everyone for the comments and suggested that it may be better to leave to the BFUG the decision on how to appoint the SC members. In this way, the BFUG could decide to appoint the BFUG Board members. He considered the third-party funding option marginal to the work on the Secretariat yet relevant from their perspective as BFUG consultative members, since it would allow moving from funding groups to funding topics more related to the goals and tasks of the BFUG more collectively.

6. Discussion on the Final Draft of the ECTS User's Guide (15 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_6_ECTS_Users_Guide_Draft4.1

The European Commission presented the Final Draft of the ECTS User's Guide and started by recalling the timeline since the previous BFUG meeting held online in March. She pointed out

that 13 comments had been received for the revised draft circulated after the BFUG meeting in March, which had been considered for the Final Draft. The EC mentioned the topics most raised in comments, the first one being the use of ECTS beyond higher education, with a very sizeable minority having reservations in this regard. In response, she pointed out that the draft made it very explicit that each country would decide how the use of ECTS outside higher education happens, and that it would need to be underpinned by QA and agreed only after consultation with stakeholders. Another topic raised was the applicability of ECTS to micro-credentials, with the final draft acknowledging the different scenarios (Different contexts and scenarios (e.g. new micro-credentials vs. those part of existing programme), clarifying how their alignment with NQF works in practice and that it is up to the institution to decide on stacking.

The Commission pointed out that a remaining issue was grading, with some divergent views on how the grade conversion should happen in practice. The EC highlighted that grade conversion was of the essential parts of the revision since it had been clear that the process hadn't worked in practice, particularly through reports where it had been not transparent how grades are converted and why a student gets a particular grade.

She pointed out that in the revised ECTS User's Guide the grade transparency would be obligatory, while the conversion would be optional. Furthermore, the Guide introduced that the institution where the student is graded should provide the reference grade because that institution knows best where to place the student in this ECTS reference grade. On the issue of awarding credits and issuing credentials, the Commission clarified that only recognized education institutions may award credits. Finally, the Commission presented the amendments that were not taken on board, including the removal of the ESG compliance as a criterion for awarding ECTS in higher education, including a separate section for arts education and further separating between formal and non-formal learning. For the last item, the draft nevertheless strengthened the requirement to specify the origin of credits (formal, non-formal or informal learning).

The incoming North Macedonian BFUG Co-chair emphasised the importance of adequately taking into consideration the needs of arts' programmes, particularly in relation to quality assurance.

Upon a question from the Austrian WG on Monitoring Co-chair on changing the expectation to indicate EQF level from 'must' to 'should', the Commission responded that it was a clarification in relation to received comments and the substance of the provision. The Austrian WG Co-chair further asked whether the clarification on grade conversion would be received before the BFUG and asked for a confirmation that the home institution would still have to convert the grade into their own system if needed. The Commission confirmed and added that the host institution would have the burden to place the grade on the reference grading table, with the home institution then applying the table to convert the grade if needed. She emphasised that the Advisory Group found the current method, based on grade distribution, was not working as most institutions did not use it and just provided a grade in their own system, without clarifying the methods. In this sense, the AG proposed a translation tool between the two systems, so when the host institution grades they do it both according to their own system and by using the ECTS reference table.

The outgoing Norwegian BFUG Co-chairs expressed their support for opening up ECTS beyond higher education to vocational education training, yet they considered equally important to still reserve ESG and the other EHEA tools for higher education exclusively. She pointed out that

Norway was not entirely convinced that the current reference to the EQF were sufficiently clear and that they would send comments in writing. They also considered the document very long for a practical guide, suggesting that some of the sections be abbreviated.

7. Discussion on the Final Draft of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA and the Draft 1 of the European Approach for the QA of Joint Programmes

Anna Gover, in her capacity as secretary to the ESG Revision Steering Committee, gave an online presentation on behalf of the group. She informed that 17 BFUG members contributed with comments to the previous draft until the deadline of 14th of September. Since the SC had not been able to process all proposals in one meeting, she emphasised that report would include revisions exclusively for the introduction and the first part of part I, whereas for the remaining sections she would only highlight some main comments received.

From a general perspective, BFUG members overall welcomed the direction taken, yet some clear contradictions in some feedback emerged, particularly on whether the text should be expanded or be reduced. She pointed out that some comments aimed at reopening decisions already taken, such as the focus on learning and teaching, and thus were not considered. The SC further decided to retain artificial intelligence in the revised draft and not to include references to specific types of education in standards since the introduction clarifies the applicability to all types of HE provision. She pointed out that some terminology checks included the revision from QF-EHEA levels to cycles, mentioning 'programmes' instead of 'study programmes' and avoiding 'should' in guidelines.

In the introduction, the new draft would reword the foreword to ensure the accuracy regarding the history, authors and process of developing the ESG, and a new reference would be added to the role of QA in finding sustainable solutions for global challenges. The revised draft would also include an explanation of what agency activities are considered external QA under the scope of ESG. In the section for definitions, she pointed out that the definition for 'joint programme' would be removed since the term was not used in the text.

In Standard 1.1, the revised draft would include additional wording in the guidelines when it comes to the list of fundamental values. In Standard 1.2, a reference would be added that programs should be informed by the latest *research*, academic and professional developments, and add a reference to active citizenship in order to balance the focus towards employability. She also mentioned that wording in the guidelines around students being equal partners in the curriculum design and review processes would be maintained.

For Standard 1.3, the SC would revisit the guidelines referring to QA processes for student assessment in order to ensure that these are logical and relevant also for continuous assessment, including through personalised feedback for students. For the Standard on the teaching staff, the reference to the evolving role of staff moved into the guidelines and the 'sufficient' share of core staff under long-term employment was changed into 'appropriate'.

ENQA then moved to presenting remaining comments that the SC would discuss, such improving the clarity regarding the requirement to publish relevant outcomes of quality assurance processes, the regulatory requirements and those about external QA focusing on different organizational levels, as well as the new requirement on the publication of self-evaluation reports. In Part II, comments included the suggestion to have a holistic approach when evaluating whether agencies address Part I, the expectation to check whether institutions have processes in place to reference programmes to QF-EHEA cycles rather than checking that directly. Other topics included the participation of stakeholders in site visits (to be clear that this is around the participation as interviewees and not as panel members), the training of experts, the requirement to publish any additional documents that are used in the decision making, and the requirement for the structure for appeals to be within the agency. In Part III, comments included the clarification of what is included 'within the scope' of ESG (to be considered in line with the definition in the introduction), and the reinsertion of the standard on official status, requested by 3 BFUG members.

Finally, ENQA gave updates on the first draft of the revised European Approach for the QA of Joint Programmes, where a draft zero had been circulated to targeted stakeholders during summer and the first draft would be tabled in due time for the BFUG meeting in Dublin.

8. Updates from the Iași-Chișinău Communiqué Drafting Committee (25 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_8_Draft-0.1-Communique
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_8_2_BFUG-Autumn-2026-Survey_21.09.2026

The ESU Co-chair gave updates and presented the timeline of the Drafting Committee's work. She informed of the DC meeting in Bucharest in June 2026, organised by the EHEA Secretariat at ARACIS, in preparation of which the Drafting Committee requested input from the working structures. In the meeting, based on the input from the working structures that submitted it, the DC agreed on the structure of the Communiqué, brainstormed on its content and divided work over summer, with DC members volunteering to contribute to sections. She informed that the Secretariat then compiled the input received into a first draft that was endorsed afterwards by the DC. She concluded with the proposal for the BFUG survey that had been discussed with the DC in order to gauge the priorities of BFUG members and ensure the backing of the mandates given by the draft Communiqué.

The Romanian DC Co-chair then gave an overview of its content, emphasising that the structured followed the sequence from Tirana covering fundamental values, key commitments, inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA, with additional sections covering digitalisation & artificial intelligence and future priorities. She emphasised that the main overarching topic was 'fostering trust', with various commitments by and mandates from the ministers to strengthen implementation, adjust Bologna tools and address challenges facing higher education by 2030 and beyond. The Romanian DC Co-chair thanked the DC members and the working structures which had contributed so far and thanked the Secretariat for their support in putting together the contributions.

EURASHE mentioned that within the BP4LnT project a stream of work included discussions on how to better position learning and teaching within the Communiqué, including in consideration of how it is impacted by AI and other trends. In this sense, EURASHE raised the need to discuss measures to embed L&T in the future cycles, such as through a suitable working structure to take it forward or a tool that ministers would endorse and which would recommit to putting students and L&T at the centre. He confirmed that EURASHE would send a written input to the DC in this regard.

In relation to a question from EUA, the DC co-chairs clarified that the DC would have a meeting before the BFUG were adjustments would be made so that a new version is provided in time for the BFUG, which however would not lead to a complete reformulation before the BFUG meeting due to the limited timeline. EUA welcomed the input as a good first draft, yet pointed out that the target audience for Communiqué goes beyond those engaged in the BFUG. As such, he suggested that the document looks not only at BFUG's work but also speaks to the broader sector and sets an agenda forward.

9. Agenda for the CI BFUG meeting (15 min)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_9_BFUG-Draft-agenda

The Irish BFUG Co-chair informed the Board members about the practicalities for the upcoming BFUG meeting in Dublin, and the Head of Secretariat gave a brief overview of the draft agenda and expected items for discussion and decision. He informed that the decisions on the ESG and the ECTS were included in Day 1, allowing some time in Day 2 as a buffer for continuing the discussions if needed. In the morning of Day 2, he recalled the TF on the Future of Bologna's proposal to organise a debate on future priorities, including by referencing the study and the results of the BFUG survey to be distributed beforehand. He also mentioned that an additional point raised in the Board meeting was an update from the Commission on the EC funding and the impact on the Work Programme's timeline.

The Lithuanian incoming BFUG Co-chair pointed out that some items, such as the Report on Fundamental Values and the documents from the TF on establishing a long-term Secretariat would require more than 30 minutes. The Dutch WG on IM Co-chair emphasised the need to strictly enforce the deadline for submitting documents, with the EUA BICG Co-chair further suggesting a strict, allocated time for presentations.

The European Commission pointed out that their new Head of Unit would attend their first BFUG meeting and an introduction from his side at the beginning would be appropriate. She also suggested to present the Skills Portability Initiative as an information point in the BFUG since the document references various Bologna tools for the first time in a binding EU legal instrument.

Upon a question from ESU, the EHEA Secretariat confirmed that answers from Serbia and Georgia had been received to the letters sent by the Cypriot and Norwegian outgoing BFUG Co-chair in the follow-up of the previous BFUG meeting and that they had been included for information on the agenda of the BFUG meeting in Dublin. The EHEA Secretariat further suggested to ask major comments to be submitted in writing before the BFUG.

Ireland thanked the BFUG Board members for the contributions and informed that they will work with the Secretariat on revising the draft agenda based on the received input.

10. Application for EHEA partnership status from Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA)

Documents: BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_10_1_Application_MCAA
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_10_2_Background_Note_MCAA

The Head of Secretariat introduced the application from MCAA and confirmed that it respected the formal requirements for submission. He continued with explaining the procedures and criteria for obtaining EHEA partnership status. The European Commission was in favour of the proposal and no one opposed it. The Montenegrin BFUG Co-chair concluded by noting that the BFUG Board would recommend the BFUG to grant the EHEA partnership status to MCAA.

11. Information from the incoming BFUG Co-chairs (10 min)

Documents: Updates from North Macedonia (CII BFUG Board meeting)
BFUG_Board_100_IE_ME_11_2_Incoming_Co-chairs_Lithuania_23.09

The incoming North Macedonian BFUG Co-chair informed about the upcoming BFUG Board meetings which would take place in Skopje on the 12th of January and 10th of March 2026. He further highlighted key aspects about their engagement with the Bologna Process and informed that the Board meetings would take place at the Club of Members of Parliament.

The incoming Lithuanian BFUG Co-chair gave a brief presentation of Lithuania, their higher education system and their priorities during the upcoming Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council, which in higher education include strengthening European Universities alliances as drivers of European competitiveness, advancing attractive and sustainable careers, supporting the implementation of micro-credentials and promoting inclusive access to higher education. She informed of the tentative dates of the upcoming BFUG meetings in Vilnius (18-19 February 2027) and Kaunas (12-13 April 2027). Upon a question from the Dutch WG on IM Co-chair, the Lithuanian incoming BFUG Co-chairs confirmed that organising the DGHE and the second BFUG in Kaunas back-to-back was intentional and, based on the calendar, it was expected that not so many documents would be left for preparation for the BFUG meeting in Kaunas, allowing sufficient time for delegates to prepare both meetings.

12. AOB and closing remarks

The Board members thanked the Montenegrin Co-chairs for the great hospitality and organisation. The EHEA Secretariat gave reminders regarding the agreed deadlines and thanked the Co-chairs for the collaboration. The Irish BFUG Co-chair looked forward to continuing the discussions in Dublin and thanked the Secretariat for the support and the Montenegrin colleagues for the cooperation. The Montenegrin BFUG Co-chair thanked everyone, wished safe travels and closed the 100th BFUG Board meeting.