Romania's proposal on the Steering Committee of the EHEA Secretariat association

Romania proposes that the Steering Committee of the EHEA Secretariat Association be made up of five members:

- the vice-chair of the BFUG
- four individuals nominated by full members and selected by the General Assembly, drawn from the countries that are members of the BFUG Board during the Steering Committee's tenure (the period between two Ministerial Conferences, as indicated in Art. 15 (4) of the Draft Statutes).

The European Commission and one representative of consultative members would attend its meetings and speak, but would not vote. The host higher education institution would attend the SC meeting as an observer for administrative purposes.

- **On the reasons why the members of the Steering Committee should be selected from the BFUG Board**

Romania applied and was selected by the BFUG to host the long-term EHEA Secretariat on an understanding, shared by the political leadership of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, **that the accountability of the Secretariat would rest solely in the hands of the existing governance bodies of the EHEA, namely the BFUG and the BFUG Board.**

For clarification, we emphasise that when referring to the countries that are members of the BFUG Board, we refer to those which, according to the Rules of Procedure, are voting members of the BFUG Board: the outgoing, current and incoming BFUG Co-chairs (BFUG Troika), together with the BFUG Vice-chair. The European Commission is the only other party with voting rights in the BFUG Board.

According to the BFUG Rules of Procedure, the Board supports the BFUG in its activities, prepares its meetings and oversees the work between the BFUG meetings (RoP-BFUG II.1). It meets at least once under each Co-Chairmanship (RoP-BFUG II.3). The Secretariat's purpose, under the draft statutes, is to support the BFUG, its Board and the Co-Chairs (Art. 6 and 7(1)(a)).

Apart from the already existing supervision role of the BFUG Board, the countries on the BFUG Board are in direct contact with the Secretariat. Under the Secretariat's accountability to the BFUG, the direct supervisors of the regular activity of the EHEA Secretariat are the BFUG Co-chairs. Creating a body with additional individuals acting in parallel with the BFUG Co-chairs and the BFUG Board in overseeing the activity of the Secretariat is not supported by Romania as it may undermine the work of the BFUG Board.

In the Task Force's proposal to the BFUG meeting held in March 2026 online, the Task Force Co-chairs asserted that *"This function [to serve as the association Steering Committee] cannot be exercised by the BFUG Board, which has different competences"*, citing high turnover.

Co-funded by the European Union

Romania agrees that the BFUG Board cannot itself be the Steering Committee: the Board is a body of the BFUG, while the Steering Committee is an organ of the Association. However, the proposal of Romania is that the BFUG Board retains control of the Steering Committee by ensuring that the composition of the Steering Committee comes from the BFUG Board. This is both **legally sound and completely feasible**, bearing in mind that:

- The members can decide in the Statutes on the conditions for who may be appointed to a body, in line with legal provisions.
- **Eligibility is not selection by someone else.** Full members nominate (draft Art. 11(1)(b)), the General Assembly votes (Art. 13(1)(c) and 13(6)) and may reject any candidate. The membership in the BFUG Board supplies only an objective condition fixed in advance.
- **The draft already proposes this.** The proposal from the Task Force Co-chairs already reserved a seat in the Steering Committee for the host of the next ministerial conference (Art. 15(3)(a)), and in previous versions also reserved a seat for the European Commission. Arguing that the same draft is not in a position to limit eligibility to BFUG Board members cannot be justified.

We would also like to disagree with the assertion that a mandate of a BFUG Board member is only six months, thus determining high turnover. While six months is the length of a Co-Chair term (RoP-EHEA I.4), a BFUG Board member place therefore lasts three semesters (18 months). Boards elsewhere have comparable terms: the EQAR Executive Board is "elected by the General Assembly for a two-year mandate".

While the members of the SC would have been appointed for the whole duration of the SC tenure (two or three years), thus exceeding their mandate in the BFUG Board, they would nevertheless be connected with the BFUG Board during the Work Programme and **ensure that at any time a majority of SC members are also existing members of the BFUG Board.**

During a three-year cycle, two Co-Chair countries start and two finish each semester, so up to about 16 different countries pass through the Board, plus the Vice-Chair country. The General Assembly has ample choice, and there is no risk of finding no willing candidates.

- **On the reasons why a Steering Committee with separate membership would diverge from existing agreements**

The BFUG already has a chain of direction: the BFUG, the Board, the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat that supports them. A committee of separate individuals would risk adding a second line above the Secretariat. The Secretariat would serve two oversight bodies.

The document presented by the Task Force in the BFUG online meeting in March asks for SC members "active and experienced in the BFUG work" and insists that membership is "ad personam" and that a member "should not be replaced temporarily by a colleague from the same ministry or organization".

The stress on representation in individual capacity severely derails the governance of the association from basic principles of international relations, even more so in an intergovernmental process such as the EHEA. **It moves the centre of gravity from the**

collective, ministerial mandate of the BFUG to some individuals. Furthermore, since the intended advertised role of the Steering Committee would be merely administrative/financial, for Romania it is unclear why there would be a need for individuals experienced in 'the BFUG work' since the policy/political control would be retained by the BFUG and its Board.

In practice, it may also be difficult to distinguish day-to-day arrangements from political ones: decisions on the budget, staffing, and management of the Secretariat, which the Task Force co-chairs propose to be handled by the Steering Committee, all may have policy implications. **In the end, the risk is that the Steering Committee could in practice control more than the BFUG and its Board, particularly in a consensus-driven environment such as the BFUG.**

The problems were acknowledged by the Task Force itself, which in the document submitted to the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen (December 2025) noted the risk that "the Secretariat would rather feel accountable to the association board than to the BFUG itself".

The Task Force's proposal presented in March 2026 in the BFUG online meeting raises further questions. It states that the BFUG itself "cannot oversee the work of the LTS to the necessary detail", so that oversight passes to the Steering Committee. **The same draft proposed by the TF co-chairs states that SC members would only "consider the advice of the BFUG Board"** while the Steering Committee "would attend the BFUG Board". The result is that the BFUG Board may risk being turned from the supervisor of the Secretariat into an adviser.

Romania would like to draw attention to the fact that this approach may contradict the principle that the Secretariat is fully accountable only to the BFUG and the BFUG Board.

Furthermore, ensuring the alignment between the BFUG Board and the SC would continue the symmetry with the BFUG and the GA. The General Assembly meets together with the BFUG**. The Steering Committee should meet together with the BFUG Board, so that the two run smoothly and decisions on the Secretariat are taken by those who direct its work.**