Romania's proposal for the selection of the Head of the EHEA Secretariat

1. Romania's proposal in brief

Romania proposes that the Head of the Secretariat be selected through the regular bodies of the EHEA, in four steps:

1. The BFUG agrees on the Call for selection **and the selection criteria**, without leaving essential elements to a different body.
2. **Applications** are received by the BFUG Co-Chairs, through a mailbox that only they access, and not by an external agency, with no connection with the BFUG and its governance structures.
3. **Compliance check and pre-selection.** A group of Task Force members checks the applications against the eligibility criteria of the call and, if needed, shortlists the applicants. The number of members is set according to the number of applications received. Romania, as a member of the Task Force, will not participate in the process.
4. **Interviews.** A Selection Panel composed of the voting members of the BFUG Board and one representative of consultative members interviews the shortlisted applicants, in accordance with the selection criteria set by the BFUG in advance. Romania, as a member of the Task Force, will not participate in the process.
5. **Recommendation and decision.** The BFUG Board analyses and endorses the result and submits the proposal to the BFUG, in line with the Rules of Procedure (RoP-BFUG II.1). The BFUG decides at its meeting in February 2027.

2. On the receipt of applications

According to the BFUG Rules of Procedure, the Co-Chairs are "responsible for the diligent and timely preparation of the BFUG Board and of the BFUG" and act "with the necessary neutrality" (RoP-BFUG III.1). They are accountable to the BFUG, and they are already responsible for the process.

Romania finds it inappropriate that in a selection process advertised to the public, the applications are not received by a regular body of the EHEA but by a party external to the BFUG.

Even more so, the whole arrangement is even more confusing considering that the Task Force Co-chairs propose that the applications are received by the Czech Erasmus+ agency, which applied to host the Secretariat and was not selected by the BFUG. While the TF argues that the Czech Erasmus+ agency coordinates a project supporting the implementation of the long-term EHEA Secretariat, this does not provide any grounds for its involvement in the selection of the Head of Secretariat.

3. On the selection process

The BFUG Board is the regular body for preparing BFUG decisions, according to the Rules of Procedure:

- "The BFUG Board shall prepare the meetings of the BFUG and oversee the work between the meetings of the BFUG." (RoP-BFUG II.1)
- "The Board (…) contributes to preparing the decisions of the BFUG." (RoP-BFUG II.1)

Romania's proposal follows what was proposed by the Task Force on the Rules and Regulations, also co-chaired by EUA and the Czech Republic, and discussed in the BFUG as the basis on which the whole process of setting up the long-term Secretariat was established: the Task Force's concept note of February 2024, delivered and discussed at the BFUG meeting in Brussels, which stated that "The BFUG should approve the appointment based on a proposal by the BFUG Board" (§5.1):

> The position of the Head of Secretariat should be recruited through an open competition. The BFUG should approve the appointment based on a proposal by the BFUG Board. The Head of Secretariat should report to the BFUG.

A Selection Panel that reports directly to the BFUG and is not composed of the BFUG Board members would not be accountable to the BFUG Board. If a regular body already exists and has the task in its attributions, there is no reason to create a new structure, with members still to be chosen based on criteria which have not been discussed in the BFUG or BFUG Board, to do what the Board should already do. **Furthermore, such a new body, in the proposal of the Task Force, would not be established in line with the Rules of Procedure, which determine the types of structures that the BFUG can establish, and require for them separate Terms of Reference.**

The voting members of the BFUG Board are already diverse by design, including both EU and non-EU members and the European Commission. While Romania is a voting BFUG Board member as BFUG Vice-chair, we will withdraw from the selection process and suggest to include instead a consultative member representative in the selection panel.

The Task Force would serve the Panel in a support capacity.

The Task Force Co-chairs issued a Call for volunteers for individuals to serve in the Selection Panel, without waiting for the endorsement of the approach by the BFUG, and invited members to submit proposals in writing or verbally to the Task Force Co-chairs. We already submitted our dissatisfaction with the process conducted by the Task Force Co-chairs, which pre-empts the decision of the BFUG by launching a selection process with no actual criteria and transparency, with major issues left open, such as who would propose the list of candidates for the Selection Panel and when, whether there will be an election in the BFUG, etc.

The whole process is being conducted without asking the Board's opinion or whether they would be up to do the work, despite our suggestions in the previous two Task Force meetings.

Irrespective of the decision taken on creating an additional panel, the decisions should still be kept within the EHEA governance bodies and, in that case, such a panel should submit proposals to the BFUG Board, with the BFUG Board conducting the final interviews and making a proposal to the BFUG.

4. On the criteria for selection

Romania highlights that the selection criteria should be decided by the BFUG and not through a separate mechanism or body. Allowing the Panel to add selection criteria during the process conflicts with the transparency and merit principles agreed by the BFUG and with standard European practice.

Criteria, weightings and thresholds should be fixed and documented before the call is launched and consistency should be ensured between responsibilities, profile, criteria and weightings.

Some information in the Vacancy note may create misaligned expectations about the role of the Head of Secretariat, including inaccurate references to the role of the Head of Secretariat such as 'coordinating' the work of the BFUG or contributing to European higher education reform, without considering the actual, practical day-to-day administrative and technical work of the Head of Secretariat.

On the criteria themselves:

- "Strategic leadership and management" (20%) and "Organisational, financial and team management" (25%) very much overlap. This risks double counting and a 45% weighting to one of the criteria.
- The grid says EHEA knowledge is only "ideally" required, while the Profile lists knowledge of European or international higher education as a requirement.
- 'Knowledge and understanding of Europe' is a rather strange and unquantifiable expectation, whereas 'Proven ability to operate impartially and effectively in a diverse international political and institutional environment' is measured at 15% with difficult-to-determine measurement criteria
- There should be a scoring scale with descriptors (e.g., 0–5) and a minimum threshold per criterion and overall, for passing to the next stage.

5. On the place of the interviews

The Secretariat will have its seat in Bucharest, and the Head of Secretariat will work there. Online interviews give every applicant identical conditions, and spare the interviewers and the applicants the travel. Romania is not convinced that in-person interviews are necessary. If the BFUG considers that in-person interviews are necessary, Bucharest would be the natural venue, or the location of the BFUG Board meetings, which would spare additional travel for interviewers.

6. On the timeline

According to the Roadmap adopted by the BFUG, the new Head of Secretariat should recruit and train new staff and support organisational matters so that the new Secretariat is effective on the 1st of July 2027.

Should a Head of Secretariat be selected only at the BFUG meeting in mid-April, a contract would be signed earliest in late April/early May, with less than two months to launch a call for staff, interview, hire, and expect them to relocate to Romania.

This would risk having little to no actual staff of the new Secretariat at the start of the term, affecting the reputation of the new body. This is why Romania's suggestion is to finalise the process by the BFUG meeting in February. Moreover, we see no reason to delay the selection process.

Annex: Timeline proposed by Romania for the selection of the Head of the Secretariat

When	Who	What
2026		
5 November (BFUG meeting)	BFUG	The BFUG approves the recruitment procedure, the job description, the selection criteria and the vacancy notice. If not possible, the approval is proposed by the BFUG Co-chairs to the BFUG through written approval by the end of November. Romania confirms the formal employer, the legal arrangements and the facilities of the Secretariat.
By 30 November	BFUG members and consultative members	The vacancy is published on the EHEA website and in relevant media, and disseminated by BFUG members and consultative members.
First half of December (online)	Chair and members of the Selection Panel Task Force (secretarial support)	1st Panel meeting: working method within the criteria approved by the BFUG, scoring scale, division of tasks. Declarations of interest and confidentiality by the Panel members and the Task Force members
2027		
5 January	Lithuanian Co-Chairs	Deadline for applications. The Co-Chairs register them and, after the deadline, submit them to the Task Force.
6–11 January	Group of Task Force members (number set by the number of applications)	The Task Force agrees on the internal division of tasks. Compliance and eligibility check against the criteria of the call. The TF passes the applications to the Panel, together with the list of those that did not pass the check and the reasons. All Panel members have access to all applications.
14 January (online)	Selection Panel	2nd Panel meeting: The Panel confirms its working method and allocates the applications for individual review, with at least three reviewers for each.
14–19 January	Each Selection Panel member	Individual written review and scoring against the criteria approved by the BFUG, with a short report.

When	Who	What
21 January (online)	Selection Panel Task Force (secretarial support)	3rd Panel meeting. Analysis of the reviews and establishment of the shortlist of 5 to 10 applicants for online interviews.
25 January – 5 February (online)	Selection Panel	Structured online interviews on the basis of the interview guide, followed by scoring by each Panel member.
8–9 February (online)	Selection Panel	4th Panel meeting. Final ranking and reasoned recommendation of one candidate or, if not possible to distinguish, two candidates.
February, before the BFUG meeting	Chair of the Selection Panel BFUG Board BFUG Co-Chairs	The Chair submits the report to the BFUG Board, which endorses it.
18–19 February	BFUG	The Selection Panel presents the recommendation, as endorsed by the BFUG Board. The BFUG discusses it and decides at the meeting. The BFUG Co-Chairs inform the applicants of the outcome.
March	General Assembly of the Association	Following the decision of the BFUG, the General Assembly appoints the Head of Secretariat, and the contract and arrangements are agreed. The contract is signed by late March.
April – June	Head of Secretariat	Initiation and handover. The Head advertises and fills the staff posts, with the relocation of staff to Bucharest, and prepares the office.
1 July 2027	Long-term EHEA Secretariat	The long-term Secretariat is operational in Bucharest.