Minutes of the 19th Task Force on establishing a long-term Secretariat meeting

18th of September 2026, Bucharest, Romania

Venue: UEFISCDI headquarters (30 Frumoasa street)

List of participants

Country/Organisation	Name	Last Name
Czech Republic	Roman	Klepetko
Czech Repubic (Co-chair)	Michal	Karpisek
Czech Republic	Ľubomír	Zvada
EHEA Secretariat	Horia Serban	Onita
EUA, Co-chair	Michael	Gaebel
European Commission	Camille	Odent
European Commission/EACEA	Julie	Anderson
EQAR	Aleksandar	Šušnjar
Hungary	András	Báló
Iceland, Co-chair	Una	Strand Viðarsdóttir
Romania	Luminița	Matei
Romania	Cezar	Haj
Project expert (Guest)	Colin	Tück

Italy, Kazakhstan and Türkiye were absent.

1. Welcome and introduction

The TF Co-chairs welcomed the members.

2. Adoption of agenda

Romania, supported by the Icelandic TF Co-chair, suggested adding a point on the agenda regarding the implementation of the Erasmus+ project „EHEA-SEC" supporting the TF on establishing a long-term EHEA Secretariat. The agenda was adopted with this change.

Romania gave updates on the situation of the hosting arrangement, mentioning that no site visit at a higher education institution would be possible during the TF meeting. She explained that a decision selecting the higher education institution from Bucharest which would host the Secretariat would be taken in October.

3. Adoption of the 18th Task Force meeting minutes

The meeting minutes were adopted without changes.

4. Discussion with the European Commission on financing the long-term Secretariat

The European Commission/EACEA presented a potential proposal that might be considered for the Erasmus+ support funding for the next BFUG work cycle:

Dates
Publication: 16 December 2026
Amendment: End of May
Deadline: 15 July 2027
Grant agreements signed: End of 2027

2026 EHEA Call (duration 3 years)
Type 1: Cooperation projects: €500k
Type 2: Secretariat: €1-1.1m
Type 3: Third-party support for work of Bologna structures (€60k per beneficiary for three years, to be administered by Secretariat. However, to check for three years what could be a reasonable amount. The grant will cover only activities /meetings that enable the work of the groups)

What we need to know by end of October/BFUG meeting in November by the latest
Can we expect applicants for working groups/thematic peer groups to be able to apply for full projects under Type 1 or should we expect them as Type 3? If yes, an estimation of how many projects under type 3?
How much budget is needed for Secretariat?

For the type 3, the European Commission explained that it would refer to a call from the Secretariat to the working structures asking for applications. She pointed out that funding not used from this strand would go back to the Secretariat for the support of the working structures.

The Commission pointed out that the working structures which would be funded through type 1 (separate funding) would not be considered for type 3, which would then require a prior understanding of potential projects to be considered for submission by working structures.

Upon questions, she clarified that the type 1 call would be an open call, not restricted to BFUG members, and that type 2 (Secretariat funding) would be a project for the Secretariat's use and not an operating grant.

The Head of Secretariat suggested to discuss in the BFUG Board and BFUG the timeline, with agenda items on potential working structures and interests in co-chairing included at the two BFUG meetings in Lithuania in spring 2027, even if the work programme would be adopted only after the Ministerial Conference. The Icelandic TF Co-chair confirmed that such an approach was also used prior to the 2015 Ministerial Conference.

Discussions continued on the legal and financial capacity that would be required in order to allow the Secretariat association to receive such a high amount of funding from the Commission in consideration of its' newly established status. The European Commission mentioned that potential arguments could include the fact that all members are public authorities, drawing parallels with EQAR or CIMEA.

EQAR further mentioned that a reverse (per a contrario) argument could be applied, as EQAR cannot apply to operating grants due to its' governmental membership, which should give reasons for the association to apply to non-competitive calls due to its' status. The EUA TF Co-chair added that more clarity is needed on what is expected as means to prove financial capacity. Romania pointed out that they would provide a legal statement guaranteeing that all office costs

would be fully covered, thus supporting the assessment of financial capacity. The Head of Secretariat added that jurisprudence from public procurement law could be used to argue for the association's public status by combining criteria related to decision-making and source of funding.

The European Commission asked when the first membership fees would start being collected, with the EUA TF Co-chair replying that the intention would be to ask for payment already in late spring 2027.

The Head of Secretariat mentioned that the timing would allow projects to start soon after their establishment and thus better align the funding with the BFUG timeline. He mentioned that the small-scale funding for working structures (type 3) should ensure that decision is retained by the BFUG. He asked whether the destination of funding could not be included in the ToRs/Action Plans of working structures, particularly if the desire is to fund participation at meetings which could be paid directly by the Secretariat. The EUA TF Co-chair pointed out that such practice, already in place in some working structures, would change expectations about who pays for attending the meetings of the BFUG working structures.

5. **Discussion on the Draft Statutes**

The TF discussed the draft Statutes article by article, considering the comments received from the European Commission and Romania.

In relation to Article 7, Hungary asked what would be the relation between the hosting country of the next Ministerial Conference and the Secretariat. The Head of Secretariat pointed out that such a relation would need to be clarified particularly in relation to the support of the Secretariat in the organisation of the Ministerial Conference, with the EUA TF Co-chair recalling that the new Secretariat arrangement would call into discussion the changing role of the BFUG Vice-chair as well. It was nevertheless agreed that this matter would not be raised for the time being.

In relation to Article 8, the European Commission suggested that a provision is introduced granting them observer status upon application. The European Commission explained that they cannot become a member of the association, with even the observer status requiring an approval by the cabinet, which had been initiated and would be expected to take around three months. In this sense, the Commission suggested to keep the language in the Statutes as general as possible for the moment and recalled the Head of Secretariat's suggestion that lawyers from the Commission and Romania meet to discuss this further.

Colin recalled that the provision for observers referred to BFUG members that cannot become full members in the association, but which would still be engaged and contribute, and considered that an additional reference might not be needed. The TF discussed three options: 1) Mention that EC can receive full membership status and, if not requested, can obtain observer status by default 2) Mention that BFUG members which are not members of the association can be observers (without creating a distinct status) 3) Mention that BFUG members which are not members of the association can be granted observer status. The TF also discussed to what extent observer status could be granted to UNESCO/Council of Europe, which could otherwise apply for consultative members. It was agreed not to have any new provision for now and discuss this further.

Pertaining to Article 13, the European Commission supported by Romania proposed that the decision of the association's General Assembly are taken in line with the decisions of the EHEA and BFUG. The Czech Republic TF Co-chair suggested to exclude this for the adoption of fees and Colin suggested to exclude it from the competence of naming the steering committee. The amendment was introduced with these changes.

Colin asked about the rationale of Romania's amendment that the BFUG agrees on the limits of the legal mandate of the HoS, pointing out that this would be a matter reserved to representing the association. Romania argued that the only decision-making bodies that should be able to offer instructions to the HoS are the BFUG and the BFUG Board, with the association being a vehicle for the EHEA Secretariat. Romania further mentioned that the association bodies should only replicate the decisions of the BFUG as a formality requirement. The Head of Secretariat, supported by EQAR, argued that there is a confusion between the Secretariat as the entity of the EHEA and the association, which is also referred to as the EHEA Secretariat in the Statutes, the latter being the legal vehicle through which the EHEA Secretariat would operate.

Nevertheless, EQAR pointed out that even if the BFUG and the GA decisions would be linked, formally the GA would have to decide on the representation matters of the association. Romania argued that the EHEA Secretariat would be the Secretariat of the whole EHEA, irrespective of who would join the association, and that decisions on what the Secretariat can do should not be taken by only some members.

The TF agreed with a solution proposed by the EUA TF Co-chair stating that all content matters are to be decided by the BFUG and that the association governance bodies would only supervise purely association business.

Regarding the Article 15, Romania emphasised that they oppose creating new governance bodies and thus the Steering Committee should be aligned as much as possible with the BFUG Board. Instead of electing BFUG members for a new structure, they proposed that the BFUG co-chairs of each year would agree on a nomination for a representative serving in the Steering Committee for the whole cycle, thus ensuring that the SC is run by the BFUG Board. They also raised doubts about consultative members having voting rights in the SC whilst not paying fees and not having voting rights in any BFUG structure.

The Icelandic TF Co-chair pointed out that the BFUG Board is a preparatory body for the BFUG that changes often and has no executive role, while the Czech TF Co-chair highlighted that some BFUG Co-chairs might not be members of the association. He further suggested that BFUG Co-chairs be contacted informally to be invited to apply for the SC. The EUA TF Co-chair mentioned that the SC work would be a technical one which would not replace the role of the BFUG or the BFUG Board and which would require interested representatives serving in individual capacity. Finally, Colin mentioned a potential solution by stating in the Statutes that at least one or two members of the SC should always be members of the BFUG Board.

EQAR, supported by EUA suggested clarifying in the Statutes that the SC has no role over the policy work and remove associated competencies, e.g. overseeing the work of the Secretariat, which should be with left to the BFUG and the BFUG Board. These references were taken out and, furthermore, the draft was revised to state that the SC employs the HoS decided by the BFUG.

In Article 19, the TF operated changes in the funding sources by explaining that the association could apply to European funding and provide services to third parties. The TF clarified in the text that in-kind contributions would come from the host but could also be received from other members or consultative members subject to the agreement of the GA

Finally, the HoS recalled that the first Statutes submitted to the Court would also need to include the composition of the first SC, drawn from founding members.

6. **Discussion on the association bylaws and potential changes to the EHEA/BFUG Rules of Procedure**

The TF agreed that the two priority documents for the BFUG are the draft Statutes and the declaration of intent signed by Romania and submitted to the BFUG, committing to the offer given in the expression of interest. Subsequent to the declaration of intent, the association and the higher education institution host would sign a bailment agreement for the headquarters.

Colin explained that he proposed changes to the BFUG Rules of Procedure that would then be able to serve as also the association's bylaws subject to their approval by the association's GA. He added that another substantial proposal was to include the Secretariat's Terms of Reference directly in the RoP.

Upon the Icelandic TF Co-chair's proposal, it was agreed that the TF would not move further with proposing adjustments to the RoP BFUG at this stage due to the potential complications. The TF agreed that such changes were not necessary at this stage and could be explored after the association is established. The TF agreed to work on Internal Regulations for the association that would include the necessary procedural provisions.

7. **Discussion on the Call for the selection of the Head of Secretariat**

The TF recalled that general expectations on the profile of the Head of Secretariat had already been presented to the BFUG through the Concept Note agreed at the BFUG meeting in Copenhagen.

The Icelandic TF Co-chair pointed out that the Call should include sufficiently clear criteria so that the decision taken would not be in a position to be challenged. Romania and Hungary pointed out the need to ensure a balance between being too restrictive and too broad in the criteria.

The TF members listed the following criteria that should appear in the call:

- Masters degree or equivalent
- Experience in European higher education policy
- Managing international teams
- Communication skills
- Language skills

It was also suggested to include in the Call the estimates for the gross salary, the full-time position based in Bucharest, the information that no compensation is foreseen for relocating and a link to employment conditions in Romania. While the contract duration mentioned in the Concept Note was 5 years, with yearly appraisals, the TF discussed a probation period of 6 months.

EQAR added that both minimum and desirable criteria should be included in the call. They volunteered to prepare a first draft of the Call.

Since the HoS should be employed before the start of the mandate in order to support the establishment of the Secretariat, the TF discussed that the Call should further include that in the first months the salary would be covered by the project, if at all possible. At the Icelandic TF Co-chair's proposal, the TF would leave the issue of discussing the financing of the HoS before the 1st of July 2027 to the TF co-chairs for the moment.

The TF further discussed the timeline, with the TF agreeing with the Icelandic TF Co-chair's suggestion to open the call in November, with a decision to be taken at the BFUG meeting in February, thus allowing a buffer if the decision would need to be moved to April. The draft call would be circulated with the TF for feedback and the timeline would be presented to the next BFUG Board meeting.

In terms of the selection process, Romania outlined that a selection committee should put forward to the BFUG Board a list of candidates, with the BFUG Board conducting the final interviews in line with its role of proposing decisions to the BFUG. In this case, the BFUG Board would then propose up to three candidates to the BFUG, with Romania and EQAR suggesting that proposing one candidate would be preferable and arguing that the decision by the BFUG should follow a merit-based appointment rather than a political choice between candidates.

8. Discussion on the revised Roadmap (and, if necessary, Financial Model)

The TF agreed that revisions to the Roadmap were not necessary. The Secretariat would remind BFUG members that information on fees had been circulated in June. For members unable to pay the membership fee due to having budgets for 2027 already approved, the association would issue a double invoice in 2028. The TF considered that invoicing the full amount for 2027 would, in any case, offer a buffer for those unable to pay in 2027.

The TF pointed out that a presentation from the EC with updates on funding would be welcomed at the online information session on the 6th of October.

9. Preparation for the next BFUG-related meetings

The TF agreed on the following dates for the next TF meetings: 19th of October (15:30 CET) and 16th of November (15:30 CET).

10. Updates from the Erasmus+ project

The DZS representatives mentioned that the project entered its' final year, with expected end date in July 2027. They pointed out that the senior experts are Michael and Michal and that the main future activity would be to support the transition of the Secretariat through capacity building, including training for the new staff and drafting internal procedures.

11. Any other business

There was no other business.

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