

Extraordinary BFUG Board Meeting XC/I

Hosted by Belgium
11 April 2024

Meeting Minutes

List of participants

Country/ Institution	First Name	Last Name
Belgium Flemish Community (BFUG Co-Chair)/ Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair	Liesbeth	Hens
Belgium French Community (BFUG Co-Chair)	Caroline	Hollela
Georgia (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair)	Maia	Shukhoshvili
Spain (Outgoing BFUG Co-Chair)	Roberto	Diaz
Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair)	H.E. Mons. Paul	Tighe
Holy See (BFUG Co-Chair)/ Drafting Committee Co-Chair	Melanie	Rosenbaum
BFUG Vice-Chair	Linda	Pustina
European Commission (EC)	Svein	Hullstein
European Commission (EC)	Vanessa	Debiais-Sainton
Council of Europe	Villano	Qiriazzi
Council of Europe	Catherine	Dolgova-Dreyer
EURASHE/ WG on Learning and Teaching	Jakub	Grodecki
EURYDICE/ WG on Monitoring Co-Chair	David	Crosier
European Students' Union (ESU)/ Working Group on Social Dimension Co-Chair/ Drafting Committee Co-Chair	Horia	Onita
European University Association (EUA)/ Taskforce on Review of Rules and Regulations for the Governance of the EHEA Co-Chair	Michael	Gaebel
Iceland (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	Una Strand	Viðarsdóttir
Hungary (Incoming BFUG Co-Chair)	András	Báló
Working Group on Monitoring and Fundamental Values Co-Chair	Tone Flood	Strom
Working Group on Monitoring and Fundamental Values Co-Chair	Mihai Cezar	Haj
Working Group on Social Dimension Co-Chair	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue Co-Chair	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
Working Group on Supporting the Implementation of the Roadmap for San Marino's Accession to EHEA Co-Chair	Jordi	Llombart
Bologna Implementation Coordination Group Co-Chair	Helga	Posset
Taskforce on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community Co-Chair	Daniela Cristina	Ghitulica
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Edlira	Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Ana	Zhibaj

The extraordinary Board meeting was held upon the decision of the BFUG within the BFUG XC meeting on 11 April 2024 to determine the way forward regarding the draft agenda of the upcoming Ministerial Conference in Tirana, and the meeting took place immediately after the closing of the BFUG session on the first day (at 17.45 hrs).

The Belgium French Community Co-Chair opened the extraordinary Board meeting and advocated for a proactive role of the Board in suggesting suitable speakers and liaisons for the BFUG, to ensure alignment with the Ministerial Conference's and the Global Policy Forum's objectives. It was then decided to focus in priority on the identification of BFUG liaison persons. Those liaison persons and some of the comments of the Board members were retained in the work-in-progress document "EO BOARD 11-04-2024 - Draft_Agenda_Tirana_Ministerial".

I. Discussion on the programme of the Ministerial Conference

The draft programme of the Ministerial Conference on the first day focused on the following plenary topic, and parallel sessions following. The discussion within the Board on each topic has been included under the respective plenary discussion point, and parallel sessions:



- Plenary topic: "EHEA Thematic topic – Building Bridges: Advancing Innovation, Quality and Partnerships"

The incoming BFUG Co-Chair Iceland expressed a need for a clearer understanding of the proposed "Building Bridges: Advancing Innovation, Quality and Partnerships" topic before progressing further. The Vice Chair clarified that the relevant document containing explanation on the content of the topic had been sent on 4 March 2024 to the BFUG Co-Chairs and for their consideration prior to sending it to the rest of the BFUG. The European Commission (EC) requested the document to be displayed for all participants to review, with several participants noting that the document with the program details had not been received.

The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair suggested the appointment of BFUG liaison persons to collaborate with the Albanian ministry on content curation, speaker selection, and session coordination.

The EC voiced concerns that the added value of transnational cooperation would not be given the right spot within the proposed framework, emphasizing the centrality of this aspect to the Bologna Process's objectives.

It was proposed to temporarily interrupt discussing the plenary session to allow the Board to proceed to discussing the parallel sessions. Iceland emphasized the need to establish a foundation before delving into parallel sessions. ESU expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the objective of the plenary topic, as well as in general the other requests and proposals sent in written form after the BFUG or the Board meetings have not been addressed. The EC raised the question of the desired outcomes of the parallel sessions, that is of whether they should align with the Communiqué or address future challenges.

- Parallel session 1: Good practices and challenges to implementation of the Bologna Process Key Commitments

The WG on Monitoring Co-Chair suggested broadening the scope of the first parallel session, particularly regarding the monitoring of the Bologna Process. The suggestion was taken up, emphasizing the importance that the WG on Monitoring and the BICG collaborate in curating that agenda item.

- Parallel session 2: Encouraging international collaborations and tools to foster EHEA mobility

The Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair made a remark regarding the topic of 'Encouraging international collaborations and tools to foster EHEA mobility' (parallel session 2), noting UNESCO's potential role in this endeavour. The CG on GPD Co-Chair referred instead to UNESCO's willingness to rather handle a session of the Global Policy Forum on recognition, inquiring the feasibility of assigning them multiple tasks.

On the parallel session 2 on mobility, it was suggested that the TPG B on LRC responsible for recognition could be the liaison person for the session on automatic recognition. The EC also suggested linking automatic recognition with other topics to broaden the discussion and proposed collaboration on Mobility. The EC further suggested designating Kinga Szuly as the contact person for parallel session 2, while refining the focus to encourage transnational cooperation or cooperation within the EHEA rather than international collaboration, to avoid ambiguity.

- Parallel session 3: Digital and Green Skills for the European Workforce: the role of HE in preparing for future/new professions, including the responsible use of AI in Research and Education

The aptness of an involvement of the Council of Europe (CoE) and EURASHE in the third parallel session on 'Digital and Green Skills for the European Workforce' was outlined and noted on the draft agenda document. ESU indicated that the scope of the session is extremely narrow and inconsistent with Bologna principles, as digital and green skills are not linked only to the workforce.

- Parallel session IV Social Dimension of Higher Education

For the fourth parallel session, ESU and Croatia (the Co-chairs of the WG on SD) volunteered to be responsible for coordinating the session. The WG on SD Co-Chair suggested sending the developed objectives and proposed speakers to the Secretariat, encouraging others to do the same to compile a comprehensive program.

The Vice Chair confirmed the approach of receiving proposals from various groups for comprehensive input to be presented to Albanian authorities. She reiterated that this approach had been consistent during previous meetings, indicating openness to receiving proposals on both content and organization.



II. Discussion on the programme of the Global Policy Forum (GPF)

- GPF Parallel Session 1: The Berlin Process as one of the good practice examples of regional cooperation in implementing the Bologna Process

The Vice Chair explained that the session on the Berlin Process aimed to engage more Western Balkan countries in the Bologna Process, particularly those that have recently disengaged from the BFUG. The goal was to address key regional challenges, especially as the Ministerial Conference will be held in the Balkans for the first time. She expressed a desire for support from the EC in this endeavour, considering that the Berlin Process was coordinated by the EC and Germany. ESU disagreed with including this topic in the Global Policy Forum in the current setting, and suggested linking the Berlin Process with the EHEA within the Ministerial Conference part, since most of its members were also part of the EHEA. If it was decided to keep it within the Global Policy Forum, ESU advocated for equally presenting other (sub)regional processes from other continents, to prevent it being perceived too "Eurocentric". The CG on GPD Co-Chair suggested adding examples for regional cooperation from other regions, such as Southeast Africa, to diversify the topic. The CoE proposed expanding the session to include ministers from various successful regional cooperation schemes, such as Benelux or the Nordic countries, to facilitate meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas, enhancing the session's outcomes. EURASHE expressed support for using the session to build bridges and include the Western Balkan countries and stressed the importance of respecting the host country by having this topic. EUA suggested re-evaluating the Berlin Process session title to avoid Eurocentrism and proposed restructuring the agenda to ensure a logical flow, suggesting moving the third session forward and concluding with the adoption of the global policy statement.

- GPF Parallel Session 2: Opportunities and challenges for recognition of academic qualifications: The Lisbon Recognition Convention in the context of the Global Convention and other Regional Conventions on recognition

The CoE discussed plans for GPF parallel session 2, highlighting cooperation between the CoE and UNESCO, particularly regarding recognition, with Catherine Dreyer as the assigned person from the CoE. He highlighted the session's aims to facilitate an exchange among chairs of different regional conventions, focusing on the Lisbon Recognition Convention's achievements over 25 years and its best practices and potential lessons for other regions. The Vice Chair highlighted that the proposal presented in this part of GPF session 2 was the only concrete proposal received from UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The Albanian authorities had assessed and worked on this proposal, thus she urged potential additional suggestions for discussion and submission to be conveyed to the Ministry as soon as possible.

III. Discussion on the Plenary Topics of the Ministerial Conference and the GPF

The WG on Monitoring Co-Chair asked as to whether the focus should be on refining the program structure and content, rather than assigning people to sessions. The BICG Co-Chair emphasized the need for coherence throughout the two-day event, connecting the parallel sessions with the introduction, the Tirana Communique, and its main topics. She highlighted the importance of having a clear plan for integrating the discussions from the parallel sessions back into the plenary, possibly through roundtable discussions, and called for someone to oversee the integration of the various sessions to maintain continuity. Iceland proposed tasking an individual with aligning the Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum plenary and the parallel sessions to ensure cohesion, suggesting further discussion and decision-making on the matter the following day. ESU echoed Iceland's proposal, advocating for a clear reporting structure and the adoption of the GPF statement as the final session within the GPF. The Vice Chair explained that the proposed agenda was designed to address logistical concerns, as transitioning between plenary and parallel sessions would be time-consuming and disruptive to the flow of the event.

ESU repeated their consideration of the GPF being too "Eurocentric" and raised the fact that mobility was the topic of both a plenary and a parallel session during the GPF, while other aspects they deemed crucial, such as sustainability, were notably absent from the Ministerial and GPF agendas despite its global importance.

The CG on GPD Co-Chair highlighted the thematic overlap between the EHEA Ministerial and the GPF, suggesting to consolidate these themes into one session, particularly from a global perspective. A reformulated title was proposed, along the lines of "*Mobility and Internationalization: Instruments to Build Bridges.*" She emphasized the need to decide whether certain topics should be included in either the ministerial or the policy forum, not both. If included in the Ministerial, she suggested exploring themes like inclusion in the educational process to diversify discussions, especially considering the potential presence of non-EHEA ministers or other delegations as observers.



The EC expressed the Commission's readiness to assist with this proposed mobility session and suggested converting the mobility session into a plenary one, finding an alternative topic for the parallel session.

The WG on SD Co-Chair proposed structuring the Ministerial Conference with an overarching topic covering key findings from the Bologna implementation report, followed by parallel sessions delving deeper into specific topics, good practices, and challenges. He suggested assigning the EC and Eurydice to cover the overarching topic. ESU supported the proposal and expressed willingness to work on a parallel session focused on sustainability or inclusivity in the Global Policy Forum, suggesting the possibility of combining both topics due to their overlap. EUA supported the suggestion to begin with the main results from the Bologna implementation report, considering its past appeal to international participants.

Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair suggested that the individuals responsible for the sessions meet to brainstorm and ensure clear distinctions between them and propose feedback on their structuring. ESU raised concern about the duplication of sessions on the same topic. The Co-Chair clarified the original plan to discuss policy in the plenary and instruments in parallel sessions, agreeing that further refinement is necessary for both formats.

The EC suggested incorporating elements of cooperation and innovation into the parallel session on mobility to ensure that the original thematic topic remains addressed, aiming for a compromise. Iceland emphasized the BFUG's authority in deciding the agenda, supported by ESU, which expressed dissatisfaction about the lack of progress in incorporating into the agenda BFUG members' input. Belgium Flemish Community Co-Chair emphasized the importance of accommodating the Albanian Ministry's suggestions and proposed further discussion and agreement with them before finalizing the structure of the ministerial sessions.

IV. Discussion on other sessions of the draft programme

The WG on FV Co-Chair suggested that the title of the session regarding fundamental values should be modified into 'Our shared fundamental values throughout the EHEA', as academic excellence is only a part of it. She recommended involving the WG on Fundamental Values in the session's structuring.

ESU stressed the wish to consolidate the statements made by consultative members at an earlier point in time. They stated that placing these messages at the end of discussions would disregard previous practices and not fully acknowledge their importance. ESU also reiterated the need for addressing the points raised by the BFUG which could not be discussed during this Board meeting due to lack of time.

V. Next steps

The CoE representative emphasized the importance for the BFUG to be cautious and take into account the perspective and position of the Albanian authorities. They highlighted that the Albanian authorities are not solely accountable for logistical arrangements for the Ministerial, but also responsible for the programme. Moreover, the representative emphasized the importance of providing supportive work conditions for the Vice Chair, given her coordination role between the BFUG and the Albanian authorities.

The Vice Chair conveyed appreciation for the understanding of her role and clarified that altering the agenda might encounter opposition from the Albanian authorities, given that it had already been discussed, and that it had been agreed at the BFUG Board meeting to have it sent out immediately and to not wait for the BFUG meeting in April, to gain time. During the March Board meeting, various comments had been made regarding the agenda, and it was agreed to consider these comments preliminarily to be able to send out at least a draft programme, given the late point in time. The consensus was to send a revised draft agenda, taking into account the feedback received. The Vice-Chair stressed that the draft programme had been sent out with the invitations by the Albanian authorities, as agreed in the BFUG Board meeting in March, after having verified the version with the BFUG Co-Chairs and following the decision of the BFUG Board. She committed to conveying the Board discussion to the Albanian ministry and authorities.

The extraordinary Board meeting was closed at 18:40 hrs and reported orally to the BFUG on the second day of the BFUG XC meeting.