



## **Report of the Extraordinary meeting of the BFUG, Sarajevo, 24-25 June 2008**

An extraordinary meeting of the BFUG was held in Sarajevo with the purpose of examining the challenges and structures for the Bologna Process beyond its initial completion date for 2010. Paul Bennett and Monique Fouilhoux represented EI.

The meeting was organised around three working groups on

1. Finalising the initial agenda
2. New challenges for the next decade
3. Structures to support the future development of the European Higher Education Area.

The discussion in each WG were overlapping and constructive. They identified some clear directions for the drafting of the communiqué for the next ministerial Conference to be held in Louvain/Leuven in April 2009.

The key themes which were addressed included:

- Full integration of the academic community in the work on “Bologna” at all levels
- Recognition of the importance of stakeholders participation, identification and motivation at all levels
- A growing recognition of the interplay between academic staff conditions and the Bologna goals (including those relating to quality and sustainability of the system) e.g academic careers, portability of pensions, the effects of increased reliance on casualised staff .
- Recognition of the importance of mobility for the implementation of the Bologna Process and of the need to do more to remove obstacles to mobility and to promote incentives
- The need to bring Lifelong learning into the mainstream of higher education and on the basis of a comprehensive definition of LLL
- The social dimension in the context of demographic change and the continued exclusion of disadvantaged groups
- Recognition of the importance of labour market issues and employability and the need for action to promote the new qualifications structures at the national level
- Recognition of qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes and prior learning
- Recognition of the diversification of Higher education provision, but a clear opposition of any sort of ranking of institutions
- Growing recognition that Bologna reforms will require action by other ministries as well as the Higher education Ministries (visas, pension and social security and labour market issues
- How the above issues interface with the objectives of enhancing the EHEA’s global competitiveness

Everyone recognised that **implementation** of the agreed Bologna programme at the national level must be a high priority for national governments and other national actors

On structures there was a detailed consideration of how the existing structures have to be changed after 2010. A majority was in favour of a sequence of four ministerial meetings in the decade from 2010, to 2020, possibly organising them flexibly rather than according to the current rigid two year cycle.

There was no decision for establishing a permanent secretariat. However it was recognised that there was a need for greater continuity which might be achieved by some staff from one secretariat cycle continuing to the next. It was also acknowledged that there is a special need to have a permanent website which might have some staffing implications. In addition the suggestion was made that members of BFUG might volunteer staff to be seconded to the secretariat.

There was a general acceptance that in the future the role of Chair of the BFUG should be shared between EU and non EU national representatives, possibly on the basis of co-chairing, although the link with EU Presidencies should be sustained. In this context every one welcomed the convening of the meeting in Bosnia Herzegovina, the first non EU country, apart from Norway, to host the BFUG. It was recognised that the above proposals for structural change require considerable work to identify the most practicable ways forward. The structure debate made clear that members of the BFUG were confident that the Bologna Process could be carried forward into the next decade on the same voluntary intergovernmental basis as has been effective to date.

It is increasingly recognised that the consultative members , Business Europe, Council of Europe, EI, ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE and UNESCO CEPES " **have greatly contributed to the process of policy formulation and also play an important role in facilitating the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms** " .

The meeting took place in the context of a steadily increasing interest in the Bologna Process in other regions of the world including requests to enter into more formalised relations with the Bologna Process by non European countries. Reports were received that consideration has been given to these requests and the belief that it would be counterproductive to offer special status to some countries. Rather it was proposed that the existing openness of the Bologna process to all interested and legitimate parties should be continued on the basis of the criteria adopted by the Bergen Conference in 2005. This approach was endorsed by the group.

From the above programme of work it is clear that the Higher Education and Research unions in the EI Pan European structure will need to work with the EI secretariat to significantly increase their level of participation in " Bologna". This work needs to begin in the HERSC and changes in working methods there may be necessary. However the main responsibility of representatives of national unions will be to

- Deepen their dialogue with ministries and other agencies at the national level

- Disseminate information to members in Universities, Colleges and Research Institutions
- And promote institutional awareness and action on the implications of "Bologna".