

1 ¹We, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the member countries of the European Higher
2 Education Area (EHEA), have convened in Tirana on XX-XX May 2024, marking the 25th anniversary of the
3 Bologna Process. The past decades brought 49 countries with different political, cultural and academic
4 traditions together to cooperate within a voluntary intergovernmental process, jointly with important
5 stakeholders representing students, academic staff and higher education institutions. Within the EHEA, we
6 have reiterated our will to make the vision which inspired our predecessors a reality, and we aspire to realise
7 key commitments around higher education, on the basis of open dialogue, shared goals and fostered by a
8 closer collaboration in various sub-structures of the Bologna Process Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

9 To facilitate mobility of students and staff, we promote comparability and permeability of our higher
10 education systems, we are implementing a **three-cycle system** of programmes and degrees, compatible with
11 the overarching framework of the EHEA (QF-EHEA), organised based on learning outcomes and quantified
12 according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), we support the recognition of qualifications
13 throughout the EHEA by implementing the **Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning**
14 **Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)** and its principles, and we are
15 committed to a **Quality Culture** in Higher education, fostered by fit for purpose Quality assurance processes
16 and the responsible bodies for Quality Assurance.

17 Higher education plays a pivotal role for thriving and resilient democratic societies, and social cohesion. By
18 producing and disseminating **education as a fundamental public good** through upholding and developing
19 rigorous standards for the benefit of society, promoting democratic citizenship for students, tackling
20 disinformation and promoting critical thinking in a Quality European higher education system, the academic
21 community is to consistently inform public discourse and offer expertise in addressing and resolving societal
22 challenges. The positive force that higher education is expected to play in facing global and European
23 challenges cannot be overstated.

24 The EHEA has been essentially linked to and built on our shared fundamental values, that serve as a basis and
25 precondition for thriving higher education communities and for achieving higher education's role in society,
26 namely **academic freedom, institutional autonomy, public responsibility for and of higher education,**
27 **student and staff participation** and **academic integrity**.

28 Developments since our previous conference, including the Russian attack on Ukraine, have underlined the
29 importance of the democratic values upon which we wish to base the EHEA. The fundamental values of higher
30 education are now both more threatened and more important than they were a decade ago.

31 We therefore reiterate our commitment to the fundamental values as outlined in the 2018 Paris and 2020
32 Rome Communiqués, and we adopt the common understanding of these values as proposed by the BFUG as
33 follows and as further outlined in **ANNEX 1**.

34 As around the world tendencies to curb academic freedom are on the rise, in line with a backslide in support
35 for democracy, we **reaffirm academic freedom** as a distinct, fundamental democratic right enshrined in the
36 right to education and linked with the freedom of thought, opinion and expression, that is indispensable in
37 enabling the academic community to fulfil its various roles with regard to quality learning, teaching and
38 research. To this end, we support and respect **institutional autonomy** [, that is _____ (definition)] as a
39 precondition for academic freedom and a prerequisite for higher education institutions to fulfil both their
40 democratic and third missions and to provide quality and innovative learning, teaching and research for the
41 benefit of society. In this sense, the whole higher education community has a responsibility for higher

¹ N.B.: This is a concatenation of contributions of the BFUG sub-structures, and some contributions haven't been submitted yet and others are yet to be developed. While attending the contribution of the WGs, the Drafting Committee laid out some ideas in text form that could serve as support for a structured discussion process. The text will, obviously, undergo further revisions for coherence and synergy and be revised after WGs and Board and BFUG feedback.

42 education that connects to accountability in fulfilling their missions and the pursuit of the truth and creation
43 of knowledge as a good for broader society of which it is simultaneously a part of and should be guided itself
44 by democracy, solidarity and transparency. For fulfilling this **public responsibility of higher education**, we
45 highlight that **academic integrity** is essential, understood as the compliance with ethical and professional
46 principles and standards in learning, teaching, research, governance, outreach and any other tasks related to
47 the missions of higher education, which underpin the societal trust in and legitimation of higher education.

48 Paralleling the aforementioned public responsibility of higher education, we acknowledge the **public**
49 **responsibility for higher education** of public authorities, encompassing political, public policy, regulatory and
50 legal obligations, including support to higher education to engage in solving the problems that confront
51 broader society and adequate funding. In this sense, we reaffirm our commitment to guarantee sustainable
52 and adequate core funding that matches the inflation, while channelling earmarked initiatives through
53 investments and separate funding streams.

54 In order to ensure the aforementioned accountability and responsibility of and for higher education, we
55 emphasise and commit to the implementation of the partnership model of higher education governance on
56 all levels and in all steps of the policy cycle. As such **student and staff participation in governance** is
57 indispensable as their meaningful participation strengthens higher education governance, enhances the
58 sense of ownership, of community and of common responsibility, and it is a crucial precondition for the
59 development of high quality, socially responsible higher education. We acknowledge that the EHEA is a
60 success story built upon the principle of co-creation with stakeholders and recognise the essential and
61 constructive role that students have assumed since their official recognition as partners within the Bologna
62 process in 2001.

63 **With this, we now have a solid basis for safeguarding the fundamental values of higher education in our**
64 **respective systems.** We further recognise that while each value is essential, all six values need to be
65 implemented as a coherent whole. The way any single value is put into practice impacts the way in which
66 other values are realised.

67 The goal of making the fundamental academic values a cornerstone of the EHEA requires

- 68 - reliable monitoring of the implementation of the fundamental values of higher education within all
- 69 our education systems,
- 70 - peer learning enabling us to learn from each other's experience and
- 71 - action to address instances in which fundamental values are threatened.

72 We therefore ask the BFUG to continue its work to protect and further our fundamental values along all these
73 three lines of action.

74 We are recognising **progress in the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the**
75 **Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA** after their approval by the 2020 Rome Communiqué, with
76 yet significant steps needed to ensure adequate implementation. To further foster diversity, equity and
77 inclusion of both students and staff, **we adopt the EHEA Policy Framework for Social Dimension (Principles,**
78 **Guidelines and Indicators on Strengthening the Social Dimension in EHEA, ANNEX 2)**, proposed by the
79 dedicated BFUG Working Group, which complements the principles and guidelines with indicators and
80 explanatory descriptors. We commit to integrate them transversally in our strategies and national monitoring
81 and evaluation systems for social dimension policies, adapted to the national context. Simultaneously, we
82 will promote in the next cycle the improvement of data collection practices and European monitoring on
83 social dimension, with full support to initiatives such as Eurostudent, and **ask the BFUG to explore further**
84 **links between social dimension and other tools and commitments in higher education.**

85 Herewith, we reiterate our commitment and pursuit of an **inclusive** EHEA for all, one of the three overarching
86 objectives of EHEA by 2030, where students are fully supported, at all stages of life, through tailored policies
87 for accessing and completing higher education irrespective of any background or starting point. We
88 acknowledge the stark and prolonged impact that the **COVID pandemic** and the consequences of the
89 aggression of Ukraine had and are still having, not only on higher education systems, but also on rising
90 student poverty and cost of living crises across the continent. This has also disproportionately affected
91 students' mental health, as they experience uncertainty and personal and professional hurdles. We commit
92 to tackle these challenges together with stakeholders, including by promoting accessible student support
93 services and measures to support covering indirect costs of study (housing, transportation, meals and
94 others), such as psychological counselling and grants systems.

95 We are devoted to supporting higher education institutions in promoting the social dimension holistically, in
96 their practices and fostering inclusive learning environments, including in the digital environment,
97 irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, disability, caring responsibilities, gender identity or sexual orientation. We
98 will also pay attention to the gender dimension, by further supporting women in STEM to avoid lost potential,
99 while acknowledging this needs to go hand in hand with promoting men participation in health sciences.

100 In a fast-paced post-pandemic society, our commitment to build an **innovative** EHEA by 2030 is more
101 important and timely than ever. To train active citizens in a resilient interconnected society and to adapt to
102 future challenges, students need to be delivered with high-quality, learner-centred and innovative teaching
103 and learning, a cornerstone of EHEA policy. Amidst these developments, we reiterate that we will make our
104 commitment, to **ensure student-centred learning (SCL)**, a reality for all students, which requires additional
105 focus from authorities and higher education institutions. We reaffirm our commitment to include student-
106 centred learning in legislation and/or national strategies, ensuring adequate funding and proper support
107 structures for implementation. We encourage higher education institutions to take a proactive approach for
108 adapting to the changing environment through stakeholder participation in curriculum design, flexible
109 learning and cross-disciplinary approaches, ensuring that students are empowered to have autonomy and
110 responsibility for their learning experience including assessment, including at doctoral level. We commit to
111 support policies that bridge the disparity in educational backgrounds, including from migration experiences.

112 **We call upon the BFUG to establish a thematic peer learning group on Student-Centred Learning to bring**
113 **together institutions from across the EHEA to exchange and learn from each other, to work towards creating**
114 **a commonly shared, explicit and operational definition of student-centred learning, and to propose concrete**
115 **actions of how to enhance the implementation.** We also emphasise the importance of strengthening teacher
116 support, acknowledging teaching's significance, while respecting professional autonomy and ensuring ample
117 time for effective educational practices and collaboration, and we commit to incorporating teacher
118 pedagogical training, integrating equality and inclusion, into the curriculum for doctoral students and early
119 career researchers. **We intend to ensure that continuous professional development is accessible to all**
120 **professionals engaged in education.** Establishing teaching and learning centres is important to offer training
121 and expertise, and mentorship programs can also aid early career educators. We highlight that frameworks
122 should be established to outline educators' development and career paths. Teaching should be as valued as
123 research and its recognition can be manifested through promotions based on teaching quality, incentives for
124 innovative teaching, and support for research on teaching practices, while ensuring stable employment and
125 reasonable teaching loads. .

126 We, furthermore, reiterate our commitment to create a more **interconnected** EHEA. Following the holistic
127 view on the institutions of higher education and on the academic community, we see that exchanges and
128 international cooperation need to lead to the creation of the conditions to realize a more internationalised
129 education. We call upon the BFUG to develop a transversal approach to internationalised education, that
130 takes into account the transversal character of existing and developing transnational initiatives, such as
131 alliances of universities or joint degrees, bridging all dimensions of higher education, recognition, quality

132 assurance, or learning, teaching and research. In this regard, we advocate for the ratification of the Global
133 Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (Global Convention), and we
134 support and see with interest the developments of the European Universities Initiatives and intend to further
135 facilitate transnational education wherever possible.

136 In this respect, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG 2015) have been one of
137 the most successful initiatives of the Bologna Process, promoting trust and transparency between higher
138 education systems, facilitating not only degree recognition but also serving as a basis for the accountability
139 of higher education towards the public and the enhancement of quality through quality assurance
140 processes across EHEA. In order to keep the document in line with developments, challenges and
141 expectations, we invite the organisations and associations concerned with the elaboration of the ESG, first
142 and foremost ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group), to propose a revised version by 2026, together
143 with a revised version of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. While keeping
144 already established practices, the revised ESG should promote increased support to international
145 cooperation in higher education, put a stronger emphasis on the links with the social dimension and the
146 fundamental values, and highlight innovative practices and emerging trends such as digitalisation and
147 lifelong learning.

148 **[Insert section on] LIFE-LONG-LEARNING?**

149 We recognize that regulated professions and professional recognition are an important factor in every
150 national education system, and intend to extend our efforts for facilitating mobility also in this regard.

151 Teaching and learning policies should respect the diversity of learners, and ensure the acquisition of
152 transversal and future-proof skills. In order to live up to the ambitions of the symbiotical environmental,
153 **green transition and the technological-digital transition (twin transition)**, we are determined to speed our
154 efforts in our commitment to a greener and more sustainable future for generations to come, which can
155 afford no delay. We will bring together all the higher education stakeholders in our countries to promote and
156 enhance the academic sector's focus on the production of knowledge and solutions on the topic of **climate**
157 **change and sustainability**, while embedding education for sustainable development transversally in the
158 curricula. We commit to further support the transitions towards sustainability of higher education
159 institutions and to work globally towards achieving the sustainable development goals. We ask the BFUG to
160 dedicate space in the next work plan on identifying and multiplying best practices for supporting higher
161 education's role in the green transition as well as in the technological-digital transition.

162 Acknowledging the transformative and innovative power of digitalization and AI in higher education, we
163 emphasize the imperative of ethical considerations in their deployment. The use of AI can support
164 personalised learning activities and resources and increase experiential learning. We affirm our commitment
165 to encourage development of policies by HEIs promoting the ethical use of AI in teaching and learning and in
166 scientific practice. We encourage and will support institutions to provide AI literacy for students and staff
167 and integrate ethical principles into digitalization efforts, ensuring transparency, fairness and inclusivity, and
168 student and staff well-being. This includes engaging with students as partners and with staff on responsible
169 AI use, avoiding biases created by AI by ensuring human decision-making, maintaining data ethics and privacy
170 in learning analytics and in teaching and learning in general, and adapting assessment methods to protect
171 academic integrity. Considering ethics in digitalization and AI adoption in teaching and learning, we commit
172 to regulate the use of AI in order to enhance educational quality, inclusivity, and uphold human rights, while
173 harnessing the potential of digitalization and of AI for positive impact on our societies.

174 We note with satisfaction that San Marino has **successfully/at sufficient level** implemented the agreed
175 roadmap. Accessing the EHEA with an agreed Roadmap and with a support of the working group of the BFUG
176 has proven to be useful practice. A roadmap gives a new member country a clear indication of the next steps
177 and sets a clear timeline for the reforms. A small working group appointed by the BFUG can cooperate and

178 assist a new member in reforms. Therefore, any new member accessing the EHEA will be supported in the
179 implementation of its commitments with an agreed roadmap and a working group of the BFUG.

180 For our 2027 Ministerial Conference, we mandate the BFUG to develop a Bologna Process Implementation
181 Report assessing the main developments, including ____ [special reporting focus, FV/SD?]. We also ask the
182 BFUG to submit proposals for the main priorities for the next decade, in close cooperation with higher
183 education institutions, staff and students, and for the governance of the EHEA.

184 We gratefully accept the offer by ____ to host the next EHEA Ministerial conference of the EHEA and the
185 EHEA Global Policy Forum in 2027.

186

187 **ANNEXES**

188 **1. Fundamental Values**

189 **2. EHEA Policy Framework for Social Dimension (*Principles, Guidelines and Indicators on Strengthening the***
190 ***Social Dimension in EHEA*)**