

## **EURASHE comments and proposals for the Ministers' Paris Communiqué**

### **Comments regarding the Draft 0 presented during the BFUG meeting in Tartu, November 9, 2018**

EURASHE representatives appreciate the efforts of the Drafting group in reflecting some key themes, current circumstances, new challenges and a contribution of a wider community as formulated through various bodies. The draft provides a good starting point for further, more focused discussion. Yet, in this stage EURASHE understands that the comments should concern the general views and issues, not focusing on detailed comments of the text.

The general view of EURASHE regarding the Bologna process developments prefers to focus primarily on implementation of the existing commitments, both at the national, system levels, as well as on the thorough support for institutions for concrete strategies and actions. While there may be new challenges emerging, e.g. growing tensions within European societies, potential impact of digitalisation on a wide spectrum of economic and societal life, these should be taken into account for further development. It is important to strengthen full trust, transparency and compatibility within the formerly agreed framework, emphasising the fundamental values and key pillars of EHEA at the system level – the structure of qualification frameworks, recognition and quality assurance principles. We believe that relevant and flexible higher education will be a very appropriate response to these 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges.

Further topics should be raised to indicate a further direction of travel. However in most cases there is still not a concrete idea how the Bologna process could address issues like digitalisation, the need for life-long learning, enhancing the links between learning and research, integration of work-based learning, further engagement with communities apart from the existing instruments – qualifications, learning outcomes, credit systems, recognition, quality assurance on the foundation of underlying principles of autonomy, full students' and stakeholders' engagement. These remain crucial to the development of the Bologna process. The Paris communiqué should therefore prepare the stage for further discussions on Bologna process developments beyond 2020 by highlighting these 21<sup>st</sup> Century topics.

From this point EURASHE would like to ask for consideration of the following issues:

- Emphasis on fundamental values within a diversity and variety of provisions throughout the EHEA and within the various national systems, while respecting the autonomy and freedom of institutions, their students and staff, encouraging and supporting a diversity of institutional missions serving various educational and civic purposes. The current draft should call for a more focused and clear formulation while it does not necessarily need to be mentioned with such frequency throughout the text, rather it would have greater impact if placed clearly at the very beginning of the document as a fundamental basis.
- Promoting full and transparent implementation of key commitments throughout EHEA in order to achieve and enhance mutual trust and to meet the original objectives of the Bologna process to enhance mobility of students and staff, international cooperation and seamless recognition of qualifications and partial achievements. We believe that after the Tartu discussions there is a space for a collective agreement on a structured approach to addressing non-implementation of these objectives at the national level, to provide support for countries in their efforts to implement necessary instruments and demonstrate the key principles and values. In that aspect the Ministers should re-confirm their commitment to address the relevant agendas together with other ministers, as well as to support implementation at the institutional level.
- Underlining a significant role of higher education institutions and community in promotion of civic and democratic values in all their activities, in contributing to public debate for the benefit, coherence and stability of European societies.

- The text might reflect not only the social development, but also substantial changes to be brought by technological development (digitalisation of all aspects of human life).
- Recognition and support of diversified roles, missions, objectives and types of provisions within the differentiated landscape of higher education and various instruments for its governance with full respect to each of them seems to be still an important principle for addressing various challenges and tasks in a flexible and relevant way to serve diverse needs of our societies.
- EURASHE would support further integration of the life-long learning concept as a reflection of changing patterns within higher education, as well as need for personal and professional development of all generations. In this aspect we propose a more concrete approach of:
  - reflecting life-long learning as an integral part of the mission of higher education institutions including legal and regulatory arrangements (funding, governance, performance assessment);
  - emphasis on recognition of prior learning, further exploration of harmonisation of various national approaches in order to achieve trust, transparency and coherence of EHEA;
  - recognition of short-cycle higher education qualification as a stand-alone qualification within EHEA qualification framework while respecting other potential forms of education and training at the EQF level 5. Such a step might be reflected in the current notion of three-tier system; and
  - identification of relevant and flexible arrangements for permeability between higher education and VET
- EURASHE would not necessarily seek for new methods of learning, but rather support rethinking of existing teaching and learning arrangements, reflecting new technologies and capacity of non-traditional target groups in innovative and relevant methods of teaching and learning. Identification of appropriate ways of recognition, appreciation and support of teaching and learning activities within the national legal and regulatory frameworks seems to be of a crucial importance. Support of peer learning and exchange of experience is another “soft measure” to be promoted at the national, but even more at international levels.
- EURASHE welcomes the attention paid to linking teaching & learning with research, universities of applied sciences and other providers of professional higher education have been striving for stronger engagement of students in research activities including those carried outside school premises in cooperation with the world of work. This agenda calls, however, for respect for the mission of the institution or programme, the character and objectives of learning at various levels and various fields, the rethinking of teaching and learning provisions, as well as recognition of such activities including pedagogical innovation as part of the applied research agenda.
- The regional and local community engagement of higher education institutions and their positive contribution to social and economic developments is within the core attention of EURASHE and its members. Furthermore, these activities should be recognised as an integral part of relevant higher education institutions’ mission and reflected in legal and regulatory frameworks in order to be supported effectively. While raising the awareness of these activities is important for further development of higher education role there is currently no means of reflecting this within the Bologna process and there remains an open question how to support and reflect them within the existing Bologna instruments.

With a profound respect to the Bologna process achievements in creating and developing the common European Higher Education Area, our thorough appreciation of its collaborative and engaging approach since its very beginning, yet considering the foreseen intensive discussions on the future vision and arrangements we propose that the Ministers should mandate the BFUG to review and self-reflect upon the process, its structure and identify effective solutions for the period after 2020.

November 27, 2017