TOWARD A PERMANENT BOLOGNA SECRETARIAT?

Sjur Bergan and Irina Geantă[1]

BACKGROUND

The question of a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been raised both within and outside of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG)[2], mostly after the 2015 Ministerial conference. The BFUG discussed this as one of several options in December 2016 (Bologna Process 2016) and decided to "go on with a rotating Secretariat and not to open the discussion again" (Bologna Process 2017: 8). Outside of the BFUG, the question of a Permanent Secretariat was considered at the 2014 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference (Bergan 2015). Nevertheless, the question of setting up a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been kept alive in informal discussions but has, to our knowledge, never been explored in detail.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

The consideration of a permanent Bologna Secretariat cannot be divorced from the ongoing discussion of the future development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) itself, as the role of the Secretariat (Bologna Process 2018c) is to support the EHEA, in particular by serving the BFUG and its bodies: the Board, the Co-Chairs and the various working and advisory groups, some of which go by other names.

The discussion on the future of the European Higher Education Area was launched in earnest in the run-up to the 2010 Ministerial conference (Bergan and Deca 2018), which formally launched the EHEA and marked the transition from a "process" to an "area". This discussion is now again fully on the agenda in the run-up to the 2020 Ministerial conference, which will set the course for the next decade of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2019a and b; Isaacs this volume), as well as at the Bologna Anniversary Conference[3] in June 2019 which marked the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Bologna Declaration.

At the time of writing (February 2020), it is difficult to anticipate what priorities Ministers will set for the next decade of the EHEA. We would nevertheless be surprised if these would not include a continued focus on structural reforms – including an emphasis on implementation – as well as renewed emphasis on the social dimension of higher education, teaching and learning, and the EHEA in a global context. Not least, there is likely to be added emphasis on the fundamental values underpinning the EHEA as outlined in the Paris Communiqué (Bologna Process 2018a), and that will hopefully include a commitment to assessing how these values are implemented in EHEA member states (Bologna Process 2019c).

In other words, we see a tendency toward permanent – or at least long term – cooperation on a range of topics. In spite of the controversies around issues of implementation and non-implementation in

[1] The authors consider the issue on the background of a diverse experience as a long-time member of the BFUG (Sjur Bergan) and as a former Secretariat member (2010 – 12) with continued involvement with EHEA issues, including as a key member of the organizing team of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conferences, after that (Irina Geantă).
[2] The BFUG oversees and governs the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) between ministerial conferences, on the basis of the Declarations and Communiqués adopted by these. The work program is developed on the basis of the latest Communiqué, so that e.g. the 2018 – 20 work programs is based on the Paris Communiqué (Bologna Process 2018a). The BFUG is made up of representatives of all members and consultative members of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2018b).
[3] See http://bolognaprocess2019.it/, accessed February 4, 2020.

the run-up to the 208 Paris Ministerial Conference (Bergan and Deca, *op. cit.*, Strand Viđarsdóttir 2018), regular assessment of the extent to which commitments undertaken are converted into policies that are actually implemented, coupled with peer support in key areas, as exemplified by the current Bologna Implementation Coordination Group[4], is likely to remain a key and possibly strengthened aspect of the EHEA.

These priorities and the fact that the EHEA – or at least the Bologna Process – is entering its third decade make it imperative to reassess whether its governing structure and secretariat support are still fit for purpose. The governance structure has been addressed elsewhere (Bergan and Deca, *op. cit.*: 295 – 301), Bergan 2015, 2016). It may be argued that a longer term and stronger EHEA would also require stronger secretariat support.

In this context, two developments are worth noting. One is the fact that the need for a more stable Secretariat arrangement has already been acted on once. The original arrangement was for the country that held the BFUG Chair also to provide its secretariat. In Berlin in 2003, however, Ministers decided that "[t)he overall follow-up work will be supported by a Secretariat which the country hosting the next Ministerial Conference will provide" (Bologna Process 2003: 8) and asked the BFUG to define the further responsibilities of the BFUG, along with those of the Board. Ministers thereby established the current Secretariat arrangements, which formally took effect as of January 1, 2004[5], even if the first Secretariat under the new arrangement, provided by Norway, was in operation already in fall 2003.

The second trend is toward more long-term stability in the BFUG itself. Until 2010, the BFUG was chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency, and chairs hence rotated every six months. The Board was established in 2003 (Bologna Process 2003: 8) and the troika system established so that the Chair as well as the preceding and the following Chair would be members of the Board, along with three elected country members, the European Commission, the Vice Chair (representing the host of the upcoming Ministerial conference), and four consultative members (EUA, EURASHE, ESU, and the Council of Europe). In 2009, Ministers decided to introduce a new co-chairing arrangement, so that the BFUG would be chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency and a non-EU country (Bologna Process 2009a: 5). The troika system was then extended to include the non-EU co-chairs, so that the Board was composed of a "double troika" of the current, immediate past, and immediate future Co-Chairs, and there were no longer any elected country members of the Board (Bologna Process 2009b: 5).

Establishing a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been proposed as a possible solution but the discussion has rarely progressed beyond pointing to the numerous obstacles that could prevent such secretariat support from being established. Our main purpose in this article is to identify possible obstacles and suggest how they may be addressed should there be political will to establish a Bologna Secretariat that is more independent of the host country of the Ministerial conference and more directly at the service of the BFUG than has been the case so far.

A recurrent governance issue is the fact that the EHEA has no independent budget but rather relies on activities and projects being financed by national authorities as well as specific - and so far generous - contributions by the European Commission. As this paper focuses on the Secretariat, budget issues are considered in this context. Nevertheless, these considerations could be extended to an operational

[4] See http://www.ehea.info/page-Bologna-Implementation-Coordination-Group, accessed February 4, 2020
[5] An overview of all Bologna Secretariats will be found at http://www.ehea.info/page-bologna-secretariat, accessed February 4, 2020.

budget for the EHEA as such, to be overseen by the BFUG and managed by the Secretariat under the guidance of the Co-Chairs.

THE MEANING OF "PERMANENT"

It may well be argued that no human construct is "permanent" and that an attempt to set up a "permanent" Bologna Secretariat therefore testifies to hubris, ignorance, or both. Benjamin Franklin reputedly said that "in this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes"[6], but the list of tax evaders is longer than the list of those who evaded death.

More pragmatically, however, "permanent" has been used as the functional equivalent of "medium term". As the Rome Ministerial Conference is likely to consider the priorities of the EHEA until 2030, it would seem reasonable to consider a Secretariat that would be in place through 2030. At the very least, a "permanent" Secretariat would have to serve two Ministerial conferences, but there seems little reason to consider a time frame of less than a decade. If the "permanent" Secretariat is successful, its life span can be extended, albeit not without noting the irony of prolonging a "permanent" arrangement.

It should also be underlined that it is the structure that would be "permanent". Staff may still be recruited on fixed term contracts, although the discussions held so far would indicate that staff contracts limited to a single period between two Ministerial conferences would not be desirable, and it would seem desirable to keep the same location through the period under consideration.

TASKS

According to its terms of reference for 2018 – 20[7], the BFUG Secretariat will, as its primary function, "provide neutral support to further the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area under the authority of the BFUG". The terms of reference go on to specify a range of activities that may be summarized as providing administrative and operational support for the BFUG, Board, and working groups and other similar groups, communication (including the EHEA web site), representation, acting as a "one stop" contact point for the EHEA, and preparing the Ministerial conference. A detailed description will be found in the terms of reference. While adjustments will undoubtedly be necessary and the responsibility to serve all structures and groups need to be underlined, we believe the current terms of reference give a reasonable overview of what would be the tasks of a future "permanent" Secretariat.

STATUS

The formal status of the Secretariat has been one of the stumbling blocks so far.

An international Secretariat not bound to a single EHEA country would be less likely to serve – or be seen as serving – the interests of that particular country than one that is nationally based. To achieve this, a new structure would need to be established, and it would need to answer to an international body, such as the BFUG. This is complicated by the fact that the EHEA is an informal framework governed by what is also a relatively informal structure: the Ministerial conferences and the BFUG. Neither is established under international law.

[6] In a letter to French scientist Jean-Baptiste Leroy on November 13, 1789; the original is in French.
[7] http://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_AU_CH_63_5_ToR_Secretariat.pdf, accessed February 4, 2020.

The EHEA is essentially a relatively loosely organized, voluntary intergovernmental process, with a bare minimum of formal arrangements. Its highest decision-making body is a gathering of Ministers that is not rooted in an international agreement beyond a Ministerial declaration, it is governed between the Ministerial meetings by the BFUG, whose legitimacy arises from Ministerial communiqués, and EHEA members have few or any structural obligations beyond appointing a member of the BFUG and its groups.

Therefore, an independent Secretariat would need to be established as a separate entity rather than as a part of a Ministry of Education or any other national public or private body.

In theory, the Secretariat could be established within an existing international structure. However, any intergovernmental or non-governmental institution or organization that could be considered (e.g. the European Commission, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, EUA, EURASHE, ESU) is already strongly engaged in the EHEA and the BFUG and would not be seen as neutral[8].

This would leave the option of establishing a new intergovernmental organization or an NGO to serve as the Bologna Secretariat.

Establishing the Secretariat as an intergovernmental organization is possible but would be a cumbersome undertaking which would probably require an international treaty – such as a convention – as the basis for the EHEA and its Secretariat or – in a less ambitious version - as a basis for the Secretariat only. The Council of Europe was established by virtue of a convention (Council of Europe 1949), the Nordic Council of Ministers was also established on the basis of an international treaty (the Helsinki Treaty; Nordic Council of Ministers 2018), and the Regional Cooperation Council is based on Statutes (Regional Cooperation Council, n.d.) that contain provision for the Secretariat and stipulates this be based in Sarajevo.

Establishing a "permanent" Secretariat as an NGO seems to be a less cumbersome alternative, and through European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)[9] there is a recent precedent within the EHEA. Even if it may seem paradoxical that an intergovernmental process be served by a Secretariat with the status of an NGO, this should not be an intellectually insurmountable obstacle.

LOCATION AND PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

While European in scope, an NGO would need to be based on and operate under national legislation. By way of example, EQAR is based in Belgian law[10]. If it is decided to establish the Bologna Secretariat as an NGO, the choice of seat would decide the national legislation under which the Secretariat would be established. The ease with which any given national legislation allows the establishment and operation of NGOs with an international scope, including the ease with which they could be funded by actors outside of the host country[11], would therefore be an important criterion in the choice of the seat of the Secretariat. The legislation of the host country would also need to make it possible – and

[8] In this regard, it is recalled that a proposal by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe around 2010 that the Bologna Secretariat be entrusted to the Council met with strong and predictable resistance, including from the Council of Europe Education Department.

[9] https://www.eqar.eu/, accessed February 4, 2020.

[10] "EQAR is an International Non-Profit Association under Belgian law (aisbl/ivzw), founded by the E4 Group", cf. https://www.eqar.eu/about/eqar-structure/, accessed on February 4, 2020.

[11] Cf. the relatively recent trend for some governments of the EHEA to consider NGOs with non-national funding as "foreign agents".

not overly cumbersome – for nationals of any EHEA member States to be employed as Secretariat staff and to obtain work and residence permits.

The Secretariat would of course require adequate office space for its staff as well as adequate meeting rooms. The meetings of the BFUG and Board would still be held in the countries that hold the rotating Co-Chairmanship but working groups may want to hold at least some meetings at the seat of the Secretariat, and the Secretariat premises should also make it possible to receive some visiting groups.

Other considerations may also be taken into account in choosing the seat, such as the degree of political openness and the state of the rule of law in the country, whether proximity to any given European institutions or NGOs is desirable or not, or the desire – or not – of the public authorities of the host country to see the Secretariat established there.

The latter may extend to the provision of offices, the location of these offices (outside of any national public authority), and the conditions for such support (the real as well as formal independence with regard to national public authorities must be ensured). Prospective host countries may also offer financial support and/or offer the office premises. By way of example, the Austrian authorities offer generous conditions for the European Centre for Modern Languages, a Council of Europe Partial Agreement located in Graz.

Accessibility would be an important consideration. The city chosen as the seat of the Secretariat should have good air connections to European capitals. The offices should also be easily reachable and accessible within the city.

FINANCING

Regardless of the status of the Secretariat, it must be financed largely by EHEA members. Today, the Secretariat budget is covered by the host country and the European Commission. Only the Commission can decide whether a "permanent" Secretariat would be eligible for a similar level of Commission funding and the period for which any such funding could be committed.

This raises a number of issues that must be clarified:

How is the Secretariat budget established, and for what period?

Ideally, a multi-annual budget would allow the Secretariat to operate with a reasonable degree of predictability and allow it to plan its activities for the entire work period. It is assumed Ministerial conferences will generally be held every three years. However, many governments operate on annual budgets and may be reluctant to commit funds beyond this annual budget or may even be legally prevented from doing so.

The budget will need to be formally adopted by all payers. A budget covering the entire period between two Ministerial conferences could be adopted by Ministers; otherwise the BFUG would need to adopt the budget. The discussion so far assumes that the budget would be apportioned between the members of the EHEA, who would then adopt the budget. Should the consultative members also be expected to contribute – which would not seem a realistic expectation – they would need to be given voting rights on any budget issue and possibly also on other issues.

Once it is established, who pays the budget – and therefore who votes on budget issues – it must be decided by what majority the budget is adopted. Theoretically, options range from unanimity to

simple majority; in reality either unanimity or a very considerable qualified majority (e.g. ¾) would probably be required. It will in practice be difficult to oblige an EHEA member to contribute to a budget with which it disagrees. Depending on the size of the budget and the political situation in member States, budget negotiations could therefore be complicated and protracted.

This also points to the need to ensure the timely adoption of the budget and hence prevent situations in which the Secretariat would be unable to operate because the budget has not been adopted. EHEA members would need to agree on a deadline for the adoption of the budget as well as on measures to be taken if the deadline is not met. These could include provision for continuing operations on a monthly basis, proportionally based on the previous budget, as well as a binding commitment for EHEA members to finance the budget on this basis until the new budget is adopted.

To increase efficiency and predictability and to reduce the risk of not having the budget adopted in time, one option could be that Ministers or the BFUG agree on a tentative budget for each work period and that the annual budgets are then confirmed on that basis by the BFUG.

What should the budget comprise?

The budget would above all comprise salaries, social security, and pensions for staff. The number of staff members, the staff structure, and the level of remuneration - important elements in determining the size of the budget – must be determined as part of any decision to establish the Secretariat, and changes to the staff size or structure and hence the size of the budget must also be decided by those who finance the Secretariat. This could possibly be done by including the Secretariat budget as an annual item on the BFUG agenda or by holding an annual General Assembly end-on with the BFUG.

Beyond direct staff costs, the budget must also provide for office costs, including rent, office equipment, and running costs, staff travel, possibly travel by the Co-Chairs and Vice Chair on behalf of the BFUG (or at least for meetings with the Secretariat), and other costs that will be incurred in the setting up and running of the Secretariat. International recruitment will also entail costs in the form of moving expenses and possibly other allowances such as home visits, as well as costs linked to the recruitment itself.

At present, the BFUG has no budget of its own. As part of a decision to set up a "permanent" Secretariat, it may be considered whether partners would also establish a budget for the BFUG beyond the costs of the Secretariat.

How much does each EHEA member contribute?

This is partly a question of the total size of the budget, which must be determined by EHEA members. EHEA members must also decide, however, how the budget is to be apportioned among its members, in other words how much each member would pay.

One could imagine several formulas for apportioning the Secretariat budget between EHEA members.

Non-weighted contributions would imply that each EHEA member pays the same contribution regardless of the size of its higher education system, population, and public budget. This may not be easily accepted by the smallest EHEA member countries and would also be at variance with the apportioning of budget contributions to international institution and organizations, such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO.

A weighted contributions scale would therefore seem more realistic, and several models could be envisaged. Elements that could be taken into account include population size, the size of the BNP, the size of the higher education system (number of institutions, number of students and staff), the number or proportion of students studying abroad, or the national higher education budget. The elements taken into account must be seen as relevant, and the formula established must also not be overly complicated or based on elements that cannot easily be verified. One possibility would be to use the distribution of contributions in an existing organization, in which case the Council of Europe membership would probably most closely resemble that of the EHEA.

Variations of a weighted contributions formula could also be considered, including a combination of an equal contribution by all members up to a given limit and weighted contributions beyond that, and a specified contribution by the European Commission and weighted contributions by member states beyond that.

On the assumption that weighted contributions would be the preferred formula, once the total amount of the budget has been established, the payment by each member would then be decided by the formula established for the weighted contributions.

Risk of non-payment

Ministers may be asked to make formal commitments to paying their part of the budget. Nevertheless, as several organizations have experienced, the risk of some members not paying its budget contribution in time cannot be discarded.

Some kind of reserve funds will therefore be needed. This could possibly be established by each EHEA member making a one-off payment to the reserve when the Secretariat is set up. The size of this one-off payment would need to be decided but a minimum requirement would seem to be that the sum of one-off payments would allow the Secretariat to operate for one year. Thereafter, annual budget contributions could include an amount to strengthen the reserve fund.

The decision to establish the Secretariat may also need to include provision for actions to be taken in case of prolonged non-payment by one or more EHEA members. Besides defining what is meant by "prolonged non-payment" (possibly one year, or any other period long enough for the non-payment to affect the operation of the Secretariat), this decision will need to stipulate measures against members failing to pay their contribution (such as back payment with interest at rates to be determined, suspension of participation in the BFUG or in the EHEA after a stipulated period of non-payment) as well as measures for making up the shortfall, either by reducing Secretariat activities or by other members making extra payments, possibly subject to repayment once the missing contribution has been paid.

STAFF

An international staff

An important rationale for establishing a "permanent" Secretariat would be to ensure that staff members come from various EHEA members. The Secretariat will not be big enough to include staff members from all EHEA countries, but geographical diversity within the staff should be encouraged.

Another key consideration will be the balance between geographical diversity and material competence in higher education policy and practice. While it must be assumed that competent Secretariat staff members could be found in all EHEA members, it may not be equally easy to motivate competent candidates from all EHEA members to apply for Secretariat posts. One option would be to recruit primarily on the basis of competence but to stipulate that no more than a given proportion of the staff, or a given number of staff, may come from any given EHEA member. It would then need to be decided whether such provisions should extend to all categories of staff, since some categories may be in particular need of knowledge of the administration and language(s) of the host country.

In addition to regular staff, the Secretariat could also host interns.

The relationship to recent Bologna Secretariats should also be considered. While a transfer of experience is important, a "permanent" Secretariat is in many ways a new start and it will be successful only if it is not seen as a continuation of any recent Secretariat by other means.

Selecting the Head of Secretariat

The Head of Secretariat is an administrative rather than political leadership position. The Head should therefore be hired rather than elected. The position would need to be published internationally and be subject to an international selection procedure. The BFUG - or a group mandated by the BFUG – would need to develop an agreed job description and competence requirements, including requirements with regard to previous professional experience. At least in the final stage of the hiring process the BFUG or a group mandated by the BFUG would need to make the final selection, which may or may not be submitted to the full BFUG for approval.

While it is important the BFUG be comfortable with the selection of the Head, it is also important this be seen as hiring for a position and not an election for political office. In this sense, the experience with the relatively recent establishment of the position of President of EQAR is only partly relevant. Establishing a search committee for the Head of Secretariat could, however, be an alternative or supplement to publishing the post.

Regardless of the arrangements for the appoint of the head of Secretariat, it must be a formal and real requirement that this be a full-time position, appointment to which is incompatible with other roles, in particular roles that would imply any kind of national mandate.

Authority over and responsibility for staff

The provision for a "permanent" Secretariat must include a legal and operational definition of the employer. This would include recruitment, oversight and – in the worst of cases – dismissal. It would also include clarification of the financial responsibility for staff, i.e. payment of salaries, social security, and pensions (see also under Finances, above).

The EHEA is governed by its members through the Ministerial conferences and the BFUG, but the Co-Chairs and the Vice Chair have day to day responsibility for the BFUG and today have the authority to instruct the Secretariat in the preparation of the meetings of the BFUG and Board as well as the working groups. For the latter, the co-chairs of working groups also have authority over the working group concerned. Today, however, these are informal arrangements arising from internal decisions by the BFUG, which operates on the authority vested in it by successive Ministerial communiqués.

It is assumed that more formal and legally rooted arrangements will be required to establish who has responsibility as the employer of the staff of a "permanent" Secretariat. If the Secretariat is established through an international treaty, the treaty would specify this. If the Secretariat is established as an NGO, the statutes of the NGO would need to specify this in accordance with the law of the country in which the NGO is established. In the latter case, EQAR would serve as an important example, even if adjustments may be required.

One challenge may be that while in an NGO, the President and other officers would normally be elected *ad nominem* for a stipulated period of at least one year with provision for succession should e.g. the President step down in the period between elections, the BFUG Co-Chairs serve for six months and rotate by country rather than person.

The Head of Secretariat would be responsible for the running of the Secretariat, and further hierarchical responsibilities could be established within the Secretariat. However, the Head of Secretariat would need to report to a person or a body. This could be the Co-Chairs, but it could also be argued that reporting to Co-Chairs who change every six months would not provide sufficient stability. This would be particularly important should the Head of Secretariat be in a probation period or should there be serious issues with his/her performance.

One possibility would be to constitute a board made up of, say, 4 – 5 BFUG members, appointed for at least the period between two Ministerial conferences (normally 3 years, in some cases 2). This board could be responsible for overseeing the Secretariat, could function as a jury or an appointments board for recruitments and as a disciplinary board. By "overseeing" is meant the (internal) functioning of the Secretariat; the relationship between such a board and the Co-Chairs would need to be explored. The Head of Secretariat should also have an important voice in recruitment for positions other than his/her own, and the recruitment function of such a board could be restricted to the top position(s) in the Secretariat.

Disciplinary issues with regard to any staff member except the Head of Secretariat would in the first instance be dealt with by the Head. However, instructions for staff will need to be established and provision made for the resolution of serious disciplinary issues – including any such issue concerning the Head of Secretariat – as well as for the resolution of any conflicts between the Head of Secretariat and individual staff members.

A designated member of this board could also be responsible for approving expenses – e.g. travel expenses – incurred by the Head of Secretariat. Similar expenses incurred by other staff members would be approved by the Head of Secretariat, as would purchases or service contracts, at least up to a given amount. The board referred to above could possibly approve expenses that could not be approved by the Head of Secretariat. The Secretariat accounts would need to be audited in accordance with the laws of the country in which it is located, and the audit report needs to be accepted by the BFUG within a reasonable time limit. It is recalled that the EQAR General Assemblies consider the audit reports for EQAR.

Responsibility for salaries and other financial obligations toward staff

Somebody (or some body) must be legally responsible for the payment of salaries and other benefits (including social security and retirement benefits) to staff. This includes ensuring the future payment of retirement benefits should the Secretariat one day be discontinued, as these benefits will be linked to the life span of the individual Secretariat staff member rather than to that of the Secretariat or the

EHEA. Sufficient reserves must be set aside, and insurance contracts must be established and served, to safeguard staff.

Duration of contracts

All contracts would be limited to the period for which the Secretariat will be established. With the exception of possible secondments to ensure liaison with the host ministry of the upcoming Ministerial conference, see below, contracts could be established for the entire period for which the Secretariat is established (e.g. 10 years) or for a shorter period. However, one of the main reasons for establishing a "permanent" Secretariat would be to ensure continuity beyond the period between two Ministerial conferences, so contracts should be offered for more than two or three years. Five years would seem to be a minimum, but it would seem desirable to offer contracts covering the whole decade. At the same time, it should be considered whether there should be a maximum duration for contracts. Confirmation of contracts would reasonably be subject to satisfactory performance during a probation period.

In determining the length of contracts, consideration must be given to the need for some flexibility in Secretariat staff (including the possibility of discontinuing contracts should the Secretariat budget be significantly reduced during the period) but also to making positions in the Secretariat attractive for competent candidates from all EHEA members. Prospective candidates may be unwilling to relocate to a new country and leave their current positions for shorter term contracts.

RELATIONS TO THE AUTHORITIES OF THE HOST COUNTRY

The Secretariat will need to develop good working relations with the Ministry of Education and other bodies responsible for higher education of the host country and may also require some assistance with practical matters and in relations with other public authorities, including local authorities. The authorities of the host countries should nevertheless not be in a position to instruct the Secretariat.

It would be important to make provision for hiring national(s) of the host country. One or more staff members would need to be very well acquainted with the situation in the host country, including its higher education actors, its administrative culture, and its language(s). This would (also) apply to staff dealing with logistical and financial issues.

At the same time, it is important that the host country not exercise undue influence over the Secretariat. While it may be desirable to stipulate that at least one or two staff member(s) be recruited from the host country, it may also be desirable to stipulate a maximum number for such recruitments. It should also be considered whether there should be provision for recruitment to specific posts. An arrangement whereby the Head of the Secretariat be a citizen of an EHEA country other than the host country, whereas the Deputy Head or a similar position by filled by a national of the host country would not be unusual. It is recalled that at CEPES (the UNESCO center for higher education in Europe, based in Bucureşti), the Director was non-Romanian, whereas the Deputy Director was Romanian. In the early years of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, the Executive Director was non-Austrian and the Deputy Director/Head of Programs Austrian; today both posts are filled by non-Austrians.

RELATIONS TO THE AUTHORITIES OF HOST COUNTRIES OF MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES

The Secretariat will also need to have good working relations with the Ministry of Education of the host country of the coming Ministerial conference. This implies that it will need to relate to at least four different Ministries of Education within the next decade[12].

The host Ministry of the upcoming conference should appoint a liaison officer to the Secretariat, who would be the Secretariat's contact person for all issues relating to the conference. This person should carry sufficient weight within the Ministry. The contact person could be supplemented or replaced by a seconded official, who would be identified and paid by the host of the upcoming Ministerial conference. Alternatively, specific costs for such a post could be foreseen in the multi-annual budget of the Secretariat. This person would work as a Secretariat member, under the authority of the Head of Secretariat, but would of necessity maintain a closer relationship with the authorities of his/her home country than other Secretariat staff. It is recalled that an Austrian and a Hungarian staff member were provided to the BeNeLux Bologna Secretariat for the preparation of the 2010 Ministerial conference.

It should be underlined that staff members who are citizens of countries hosting upcoming Ministerial conferences would work under the exclusive authority of the Head of Secretariat and the BFUG. It should possibly be considered whether the country hosting the Secretariat should also be eligible to host a Ministerial conference or be part of a group of countries hosting a conference.

LANGUAGE

Since English is the working language of the EHEA, it would also be the working language of the Secretariat, also in its internal communication. Even if staff members may naturally use languages other than English in their direct oral contacts, communication within the Secretariat must be such that no staff member is excluded from it for linguistic reasons. English should be the language of all written communication.

Proficiency in other languages should nevertheless be encouraged and could be a criterion in staff recruitment. As suggested above, for one or more posts proficiency in the language of the host country may be a *conditio sine qua non*.

CONCLUSION

Without making any claim to being exhaustive, this paper has sought to identify a number of issues that must be clarified if a "permanent" Bologna Secretariat is to be established. It aims to provide clarification rather than argue that a "permanent" Secretariat is a must.

The paper explores issues related to the status, financing, governance, staff, location, and relations to the host countries of Ministerial conferences as well as language arrangements and the period for which the Secretariat should be established. While exploring several options, the paper suggests that the following elements may be part of any further consideration of a "permanent" Secretariat:

[12] Assuming each Ministerial conference is organized by a single country; it is recalled that the 2009 and 2010 conferences were organized by four and two Ministries of Education, respectively.

- A Secretariat established for a period of 10 years, or at least until 2030 should the Secretariat not be established until the 2023 Ministerial conference.
- It would be less complicated to establish the Secretariat as an NGO than as a new intergovernmental organization, which would probably require an international treaty, or within an existing structure. If the NGO model is chosen, it is suggested that the experience of EQAR may be particularly relevant.
- The Secretariat budget must be agreed by EHEA members and should be based on the priorities adopted by Ministerial conferences and the BFUG work program established on this basis. Even if national regulations may make it difficult to establish multi-annual budgets, arrangements must be found to ensure financial stability for at least the period between two Ministerial conferences.
- Provision must be made for apportioning budget contributions among EHEA members, probably on the basis of weighted contributions.
- Arrangements must be made for establishing a reserve fund to cover the eventuality of delayed or missing budget contributions by EHEA members and to address cases of prolonged non-payment.
- The location of the Secretariat should be decided on the basis of a range of factors including the facility with which the Secretariat can be established and financed by international partners, any restriction on international recruitment (including work and residence permits), the availability and cost of suitable office facilities, the support from but also independence of the public authorities of the host country, and air connections.
- Secretariat staff must be international, and it may be considered whether stipulations should be made as to the maximum number of staff members from any given country.
- Responsibility for employment must be clearly defined, and this should include responsibility for the payment of staff salaries and other staff costs as well as the continued payment of staff benefits such as retirement benefits in the event the Secretariat is discontinued. Provision must be made for the recruitment, oversight and – in extreme cases – dismissal of Secretariat staff.
- While the Secretariat must be independent and serve the EHEA, represented by the BFUG and its Co-Chairs, the relationship to the country hosting the Secretariat as well as to countries hosting Ministerial conferences must be considered carefully.

The need for a longer-term Secretariat more independent of the public authorities of specific EHEA members will be decided by the vision of the EHEA toward 2030. That vision, is however, likely to include continued work on current priorities, like structural reforms and the social dimension of higher education, as well as a renewed focus on the values underpinning the EHEA and a continued, possibly strengthened, emphasis on assessing implementation. Such a development is likely to accentuate the need for an EHEA with some independent budget and reinforced governance arrangements, supported by a longer-term Secretariat. While this paper does not claim to have explored all available options for the latter, and while it will have left many questions unanswered, it is hoped it will provide a better basis for considering whether a "permanent" Secretariat should be established than what has been available so far.

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