

Recommendations and advice
for setting up a
Bologna *Committee* for Bosnia Herzegovina¹

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¹ This document uses the term 'BiH Bologna Committee' as a working title only and with no intention to pre-empt the eventual choice by the relevant authorities in BiH. The eventual title of the institution should be determined by its founders upon reflection and agreement regarding its purpose, function and scope.

1. Introduction

This document was elaborated in the frame of the joint European Commission-Council of Europe project 2009-2011 'Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina' (SHE III).

It follows the general recommendation of Gerard Madill in June 2011 to set up a *Bologna Committee* for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).²

It follows a request of the Steering Board of the joint EC/CoE project from 28 October 2010 to elaborate one or several proposals for an advisory body to conceive a countrywide Bologna strategy for BiH and oversee its implementation.

It follows extensive discussions of various stakeholders in BiH with the CoE experts Dionyssid Kladis and Gerard Madill and the CoE project team in November and December 2010.

It follows reflections on preliminary conditions for such a body of CoE experts in December 2010.³

It is intended for submission to the BiH Rectors Conference and the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH for endorsement and further implementation.

This document could not have been produced without the extensive guidance provided by the CoE experts Dionyssid Kladis and Gerard Madill following several visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina in June, November and December 2010 and the open and constructive discussions granted by a wide range of BiH stakeholders in the same period of time. The CoE owes its gratitude to all involved partners and interlocutors.

1.1 The Scope of this Document

This document outlines the potential scope of an advisory body to conceive a countrywide Bologna strategy for BiH and oversee its implementation. It was elaborated with the intention to facilitate a formal decision for its establishment and draws on good practice observed in other countries of the EHEA.

With full recognition of the specificity of the BiH context the recommendations in this document are offered as broad guidance and advice.

They are not intended to pre-empt decisions by the BiH authorities, predicate the scope and mission of other institutions in charge of higher education policy issues at state level or pre-define the statutes or the organisation of the *BiH Bologna Committee*. They may be varied, added to, or ignored as seems most appropriate for the successful implementation of the Bologna reforms in BiH and for its contribution to shaping the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

² "Report on a fact finding visit to Sarajevo 7-10 June 2010 to review and assess the need for expertise in higher education reform in BiH", Gerard Madill, July 2011

³ see "Report on the need for coordination of the implementation of the Bologna reforms in BiH", Dionyssid Kladis and Gerard Madill, December 2011

2. Shaping a *BiH Bologna Committee*

2.1 Preliminary considerations

During our consultations all stakeholders in BiH agreed that BiH lacks a comprehensive system and structures to implement Bologna Reforms across the country in a coherent and compatible way. A number of institutions have coordinating functions at state level, but none combines a sufficiently wide mandate with the necessary expertise to fill this gap.

The process of sketching out a *BiH Bologna Committee* should therefore keep five premises in focus:

- The **geographical scope**: The *Committee* must be established at state level to be able to respond to BiH's international commitments in the Bologna Process and the EHEA.
- The notion of **coordination**: There needs to be a consensus on the respective responsibilities of the *Committee* and of the other institutions with coordinating, regulatory and implementing competences as well as their interaction.
- The notion of **trust**: The efficiency of the *Committee* depends as much on its constitution as it depends on the criteria, principles and trustworthy procedures for staff selection/ nomination.
- The notion of **expertise/professional competence**: The *Committee* must be established as an expert body and advisory service to all concerned parties, without a hierarchical relationship with them. Its members/staff can't represent special interest groups (individual institutions, ethnic groups or similar).
- The notion of **availability/accessibility**: The *Committee* must operate in conditions that ensure availability of its expertise and services to the concerned institutions and individuals. This entails permanent office, visibility, effective communication with all partners, responsiveness and clarity in suggestions, proposals, guidelines etc.

Before considering issues related to structures, governance and management of a *BiH Bologna Committee* the concerned partners and decision-makers will want to develop a common understanding of the precise purpose and functions of this body and its priorities for work along the formula of 'form follows function follows purpose'.⁴

These should be clearly defined, and distinguishable from the purpose, functions and responsibilities of the already existing structures at state level – the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH, the BiH Rectors' Conference, the BiH Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA), the Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents in the Area of Higher Education (CIP) and the National Team of Higher Education Reform

⁴ Details with regards to the structures established in the various European countries in order to oversee the implementation of the Bologna Process can be found in the National Bologna Reports, see in section 'documents' at <http://www.ehea.info>.

Experts (BiH HERE) in BiH. ⁵

Whatever distribution of responsibilities is agreed – the concrete mandate of the *BiH Bologna Committee* and the terms for its interaction with the already existing environment should be clearly and unambiguously defined **before** its establishment.

2.2 Purpose

One of the major conclusions of all three subsequent joint EC/CoE projects implemented since 2003 in BiH is that the genuine implementation of the Bologna reforms is a key issue for the seminal development of higher education in BiH.

BiH explicitly lists the European strategic goals in the field of higher education, the Bologna Declaration and subsequent developments of this concept in its framework law on higher education. ⁶

Therefore a *BiH Bologna Committee* should be established with the purpose

- to coordinate the implementation of Bologna reforms
- to continuously monitor and assess the degree and the speed of implementation and to follow-up
- to ensure a genuine implementation of Bologna reforms in the BiH context
- to support the integration of Bologna reforms into the strategy of each higher education institution in BiH

2.3 Functions

Promoting Bologna

- to develop and raise awareness amongst stakeholders as to the importance and actual benefits
 - of being part of the European Higher Education Area
 - of the Bologna reforms per se
 - of the individual aspects of the Bologna reforms
- to contribute to a factual debate of Bologna related issues in BiH

Reviewing Progress

- to obtain/maintain comprehensive information on Bologna-related developments in BiH and the actual progress on the ground
- to analyse progress and ensure an appropriate follow up in close consultation with the authorities, institutions and other involved partners

Sharing experience and expertise

- to identify the actual expertise available in BiH and develop a single source of information on available expertise domestically, regionally and at European level
- to provide high level expertise and advice for strategy and policy matters related

⁵ For example, there will be a need for clarity regarding the role of the HEA with regard to its broader responsibilities for framing higher education strategy and policy in BiH, and how this aspect of its activities and the work of the BiH Bologna Council will complement each other.

⁶ Art. 2, Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH (08/2007).

- to Bologna reforms to individual institutions and collectively
- to take steps to build on and disseminate expertise in priority areas of quality assurance and national qualifications frameworks ⁷
- to facilitate the sharing of information and experience between different agencies and projects, public and private HEIs in BiH and making use of Regional (SEE) and European expertise where appropriate
- to coordinate the active participation by practitioners from BiH in international and regional conferences to share practice re Qualification Frameworks, learning outcomes, etc
- to explore possible approaches to support capacity building of student unions and to involve student participation in BiH
- to explore possible initiatives to develop a peer learning mechanism where National Rectors Conferences share expertise on a bi-lateral or multi-lateral basis, possibly coordinated with EUA

Activating reforms (allow key actors to plan, organise, and work together)

- to develop a country-wide Bologna strategy
 - informed by, but not steered by European developments
 - building on the Bologna Action Lines and the “Seven Key Strategies and Guidelines to implement the Bologna Process” adopted by the BiH Council of Ministers in December 2007
 - identifying clear and achievable goals, including: timescales and work-plans for implementing the seven key strategies, and for addressing the various other facets of HE in BiH which need to be addressed in implementing Bologna
 - articulating clearly the responsibilities of each organisation for agreeing, articulating and achieving targets
 - including high level internal targets for the next three Bologna Ministerial meetings/stocktaking exercises, and external targets for achieving visibility for BiH within the Bologna Process⁸
- to support capacity building of representative bodies
- to enhance domestic expertise for special aspects of the Bologna reforms in BiH (e.g. trainings and counselling for the use of ECTS, learning outcomes etc)
- together with the Conference of Education Ministers in BiH, the Rectors’ Conference of BiH, seek ways to encourage greater engagement & responsibility of universities, public and private, in taking forward Bologna implementation

Active participation of BiH in the EHEA

- to provide EHEA partners with credible and understandable information on the state of developments of the higher education reform in BiH (the position of BiH within the European Higher Education Area will to some extent depend on this ability)

⁷ – e.g. expertise developed in pilot projects

⁸ For example host 2 official Bologna seminars, chair 1 BFUG working group, host a meeting of EUA or ESU or international university network, etc.

- to ensure BiH's active representation in official Bologna seminars/events, European conferences, EUA events etc. and ensure that BiH profits from this participation widely through adequate reporting and dissemination (appropriate funding provided).⁹

2.3 Title

There have been a number of suggestions for the full title of the institution:

- Bologna Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Committee for the Coordination of Bologna Reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Bologna Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Bologna Coordination Unit of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Since this proposal is initially written in English, these suggestions need further consideration in the languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The final title of the institution should reflect its purpose, function and scope¹⁰. Therefore it is recommendable to choose a title emphasising the advisory and coordinating functions of this body and its continuous operation at state level. Terms denoting a loose structure - such as the word "group" in English – would seem inappropriate.

2.4 Establishment

Based on the discussions with BiH partners we assume that an institution such as a *Bologna Committee* should be established in BiH by a decree and/or agreement of the competent authorities in BiH.

Presuming a general consent on the issue, the *Committee* would ideally be established by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina upon the initiative of the Conference of Ministers of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and backed by the support of the BiH Rectors Conference.

This would emphasise the ownership of the Bologna reform agenda by the competent authorities as well as by the institutions. At the same time it would accentuate the *Committee's* relevance for the entire higher education system in BiH, including private universities and the non-university sector.

The establishment by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina could further ensure a regular budget appropriation (see below).

2.5 Legal Status

The *BiH Bologna Committee* should be established as an independent public organisation, a legal entity with advisory functions. Within the scope of its mandate it should enjoy full operational and administrative independence while being accountable for its work to its founder/the sponsoring body. This proposal suggests that the *Committee* should have its seat in the capital of BiH or in its immediate

⁹ One example is the *UK Europe Unit* which coordinates involvement of staff and students from UK universities in Bologna-related events and issues regular newsletters and updates; see <http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/home/>.

¹⁰ With scope we mean the committee's establishment and work at state level; a sine qua non condition for its serviceability.

vicinity.

2.6 Financing

We suggest the *Committee* be financed from the budget of the institutions of BiH.

2.7 Organisational Structure

The *Committee* should comprise an executive board and a permanent secretariat.

All employees of the *Committee* should be senior public officials who enjoy personal and operational independence in performing their duties.

The Executive Board would

- consist of one chair employed full-time and members engaged part-time
- have the overall responsibility for the operations of the *Committee*
- undertake or commission all tasks deriving from the *Committee's* mandate
- ensure an active representation of BiH in the Bologna follow-up structures
- report to the Bologna Secretariat and other relevant bodies on the progress achieved in BiH

The Chair of the Executive Board would

- manage the Committee
- have substantial authority delegated from the executive board (decision-making power for all routine business)
- be accountable to the executive board
- ensure an efficient consultation and cooperation with all involved partners and the authorities

The Secretariat would

- consist of competent full-time staff (permanent employment), project officers, administration and secretariat with relevant ICT skills (English language skills should be an absolute condition)
- implement the initiatives of the Committee, under the direction of the chair
- ensure an effective communication and information flow between HEIs and the Committee

2.8 Principles, procedures and criteria for staff selection

The composition of the board should follow a transparent and trustworthy procedure, based on widely accepted criteria, principles and procedures.

Selection Principles

- **Principle 1:** No selection/nomination of *Committee* members/staff on the basis of representativeness either of Universities or of Ministries
The Bologna reforms refer to all Higher Education Institutions, public, private and non-university sector. *Committee* members and staff need a certain freedom of movement in order to create views and assess the overall situation globally and in a holistic approach at state level. They should not act as safeguards of the interests of one institution or as two-way channels of information and there are more effective ways of communication and transfer of information.
- **Principle 2:** Acceptance and trust by all parties (Ministries, Universities, Society at

large) is ensured by the competence of the members/staff and the procedures for selection/nomination.

- **Principle 3:** No hierarchical relationship is built between the Committee on the one hand and the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH, the BiH Rectors' Conference or Universities on the other hand
The *Committee* is a parallel, supportive structure to all actors in higher education. Any kind of rivalling actions or attitudes should be avoided from the first.
- **Principle 4:** Current rectors cannot be members of the Committee.
- **Principle 5:** The involvement of students.

Selection procedures

For the *Committee's* Board we suggest a two-step procedure:

In a first step the higher education institutions in BiH propose members on the basis of competences and capacity. In a second step the authority at state level (with the official responsibility for the *Committee*) takes the decision on appointment.

To build trust into this procedure the decisions should be justified according to predefined and agreed criteria.

Selection Criteria

All members and staff of the *Committee* should have the appropriate level of commitment and expertise, the support by the relevant institutions and sufficient standing and influence among the academic community to carry out their functions.

- The members of the executive board should have
 - Qualifications at postgraduate level (*not applicable for students*)
 - A good knowledge of the development, organisation and funding of higher education in BiH (*not applicable for students*)
 - Competences in higher education policy and strategic development issues and/or in higher education management (*not applicable for students*)
 - Extensive knowledge of the Bologna Process, action lines and reform tools and relevant experience with their application/implementation (*not applicable for students*)
 - Several years of professional expertise in higher education (teaching, research, management) (*not applicable for students*)
 - *for students:* significant experience of student representation and/or policy work and good knowledge of the Bologna Process, action lines and reform tools
 - Experience of studying or working in the international context is desirable
 - Ability to relate the development of higher education with the needs of society and economy (social partners / employers) and vice versa
 - Communication, decision-making, negotiation and moderation skills
 - good standard of computer literacy, fluent in written and spoken English
- The profile of the staff members would be defined in accordance with the eventual mandate and tasks of the *Committee*, along the lines of chapter 2.2., 2.3 and 2.7 of this document.

2.9 One final consideration

Among the many issues discussed with stakeholders in BiH was the question of international involvement in the *Bologna Coordination Committee*. There were considerations of this option during the starting phase, during a later phase or a permanent involvement. Purposes mentioned were: to help build establish a

functional expert body; to help build the necessary trust in this new institution; to have someone available with an international perspective; to share experience; etc.

Such an involvement could be a delicate issue and should be considered only if the key actors in higher education in BiH deem it appropriate and helpful.

In that case, international members (or one) could be added to the composition of the *Committee* under the condition that the majority will be members from BiH. The international members should have international reputation as competent in the related issues, could be suggested by international organisations which have been involved in higher education issues in BiH (e.g. European University Association, Council of Europe, European Union) and then be approved by the authority which has the ownership of the *Committee*.