

# **ESU written report for the XC Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting Brussels, April 2024**

In this written report the ESU Presidency aims to update the BFUG on main activities of ESU since the BFUG meeting in Madrid in November 2024.

## **I. Bologna with student eyes 2024**

The Bologna with Student Eyes (BWSE) publication is going to be published in the context of the Ministerial Conference in Tirana. This is an anniversary edition of the BWSE, being the 10<sup>th</sup> publication in the series. Data was collected from 37 national unions of students from 33 members of the EHEA, as well as one non-EHEA territory (Faroe Islands). Two answers for the same country were collected due to regional specificities regarding the student union structures for Belgium (Flemish vs. French Community), United Kingdom (England + Wales + Northern Ireland vs. Scotland), Finland (HE vs. VET) and Netherlands.

Compared to previous publications, the surveys have been readjusted to ensure the capturing of new themes and trends, and linkages to the Bologna Process Implementation Report have been integrated into the publication. The data has been cross-checked with the support of experts. The following thematic chapters are included: General perception about the Bologna Process, Student Participation, Fundamental Values, Social Dimension, Quality Assurance, Key commitments, Learning and Teaching, Internationalisation & Mobility, Higher Education in emergency (including Covid and Ukraine).

We organised an anniversary panel to present the new data gathered during our 47<sup>th</sup> European Student Convention. The panel included representatives from Eurydice, EUA, ENQA and the Belgian Flemish representative as co-chair of the BFUG.

We already presented selected results of the publication in webinars of EUA and ENQA as well as in a meeting with the ENIC Bureau and NARIC Advisory Board.

## II. 2024 European Parliament Elections

ESU adopted its [manifesto on European Elections](#) in November 2022. Since then we have liaised with the European political parties to influence their manifestos to include ambitious targets on higher education. Regarding EPP, S&D/PES, the Greens and ALDE we met with politicians (usually from the drafting committee of their manifestos), and contributed through written consultations or within meetings with the civil society sector.

We created a handbook for our membership to engage in advocacy for the European Elections, including visuals and other practical material. We also embedded our work within the Civil Society Europe campaign on civic space. Ultimately, we have created the [StEUdents campaign](#), to give student issues a unified voice on European level. We also cooperated with various organisations in the sector: JEF Europe, European Youth Forum, Lifelong Learning Platform, OBESSU, Generation Climate Europe or Diaspora Vote. We organised an event in Brussels dedicated to European elections (see below).

We are now analysing the European political party manifestos and will publish a review of what they contain for students and young people. We are also working on the process of advocacy for the strategy of the upcoming Commission.

## III. ESU events

### 1. 85th Board meeting of ESU, November 2023, Tallinn

The Board meeting is our general assembly, composed of representatives of the national unions of students. The 85<sup>th</sup> Board meeting took place in November in Tallinn with the support of EUL.

The following policies were adopted:

- [Policy Paper on Social Dimension](#)
- [Statement on Artificial Intelligence](#)
- [Statement on ending gender-based violence against students.](#)

Furthermore, the Board adopted resolutions on: [Access of Bulgaria and Romania in Schengen](#), [Defending the rights of Belarusian citizens abroad](#), [Requisition of student](#)

[accommodation for the Olympics in France](#), [resolution against the French immigration bill](#), [supporting student assistants movement in Germany](#), access to [mental health](#) services and to [free menstrual products](#) in the Faroe islands, [Ending UK's hostile environment towards immigrants](#), [resolution against the attack on funding for the Swedish National Union of Students](#), [Empowering students affected by climate-induced disasters in Slovenia](#), [condemnation of raise in tuition fees and tightening of immigration policies in Finland](#), [support for the Ukrainian law on expanding the rights of students](#), access to [teaching profession](#), to [healthcare](#) and the [state of democracy](#) in Italy, [negotiations on Erasmus+ with Switzerland](#) and [support for a Students at Risk programme in Flanders](#).

The Board meeting was also joined by the Council of Europe, with whom we organised a successful session on the topic of automatic recognition. ESU is part of the ad-hoc working group of the Council of Europe on automatic recognition and this was the first consultation related to mapping the views of stakeholders on the needs to regulate automatic recognition.

## **2. Promoting student-centred learning in the European (Higher) Education Area, December 2023, Brussels**

We organised a session at the European Parliament on student-centred learning during the Lifelong Learning Week. The event was co-hosted with MEP Dragos Pislaru, chair of the EMPL Committee, and included speakers from LLLP, DG EMPL, DG EAC. You can read the conclusions of the discussions [here](#).

## **3. First edition of the Conference of student bodies of European University Alliances, December 2023, Coimbra**

The Conference of student bodies of European University Alliances is an internal statutory body of ESU composed of democratically elected student representatives at the level of Alliances. The first meeting of the Conference took place in Coimbra, Portugal in December 2023, organised with FAIRe (Portugal). Representatives from almost two thirds of Alliances have attended our event.

There were engaging panel discussions and responses to every topic we tackled: student participation in Alliances and organisation of the student bodies, social dimension, European degree, quality assurance and many others. The event concluded with discussions with policy makers (secretary of state of the Ministry of

Education from Portugal, DG EAC, Rector of Coimbra University) and stakeholders (FOR-EU 1&3 and FOR-EU 2&4 chairs, EUA, EUF, Coimbra Group) We are presently planning the second meeting. A preview of the outcome of the conference held in Coimbra can be found [here](#).

#### **4. Students emPower Education – European elections event, March 2024, Brussels**

The event emPower Education was organised with VVS with the support of the City of Brussels and the Flemish Ministry of Education. On day one we aimed to have politicians taking the stage to be scrutinised by student leaders on the future of the European Union and what it delivers for students. The Spitzenkandidat of the Party of European Socialists, Commissioner Schmit, the secretary generals of three political parties (PES, ALDE and European Greens), politicians (MEP Albuquerque) and institutional leaders from the EU and Brussels higher education stakeholders (Minister of Education on Flanders, DG EAC, EUA, EURASHE, LLLP) answered our call and debated with students. On day two, VVS organised several sessions on higher education in Flanders.

#### **5. 47th European Student Convention, March 2024, Germany**

Right after the emPower Education event, we met for the 47th European Student Convention in Cologne, Germany, organised with fzs. We took stock of recent progress in European higher education and discussed how they impact students, and concurrently how national priorities are considered in European decision-making. We protested for gender equality during the International Women's Day and presented the fresh data and key emerging conclusions from the next edition of our flagship publication, Bologna with student eyes. We are particularly happy that due to the close proximity to Brussels, we were able to invite several key stakeholders from the European higher education bubble to join us in Cologne, amongst them representatives of EUA, Eurydice, ENQA, Flemish Ministry, DAAD and the German attaché for education. We discussed topics such as the future of EHEA and EEA, European Elections, internationalisation and mobility, the Higher education package, Students at risk etc.

#### **6. 86th Board meeting, May 2024, Geneva**

We will organise the 86<sup>th</sup> Board meeting in Geneva, which will include elections for the new ESU leadership and in terms of policy: the adoption of the new Plan of Work, Statement on refugee students, Statement on VET, revision of the Student Rights Charter, revision of the Human Rights strategy and various resolutions (common values and democracy, Bologna Ministerial Conference etc.)

## 7. Other upcoming events

We will organise an online session with UNHCR on recognition pathways for refugees, where BFUG members will also be invited. The event will take place online

We will also organise the BWSEFOR2030 project final conference in Brussels on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June.

## IV. Other policy developments

ESU contributed to the European Commission's consultation on the Higher Education package with input stemming from our consultation with the membership, with the Conference of student bodies of alliances and the experience from the 3 pilot projects on the European Degree we have been engaged with. The papers are [ESU's position on the European Degree \(label\)](#), [ESU's position on the Council Recommendation on Quality Assurance and Recognition](#) and [ESU's position on sustainable and attractive academic careers](#). We have attended a session of the High Level Group on Education and Training and intervened at the informal Council meeting of HE ministers on the topic of (balanced) mobility.

We also had several solidarity statements: On the 5th of January, we wrote a statement to call for solidarity in regards to the [conflict in Sudan](#) with All-Africa Students Union, the World Assembly of Youth and Global Student Forum stand in solidarity with the General Sudanese Students Union, highlighting the impact on education and students that compromise their safety and wellbeing. On the 22nd of January, we wrote a statement with SRVŠ, to shed light on the [attacks on students by the Slovak government](#) and how that impacts the HEIs in Slovakia. On the 18th of March, ESU publicised a statement calling for human rights propositions and ending [violence in Greece against students](#) protesting a higher education reform bill. We furthermore inquired with different stakeholders and partners on possibilities for supporting Palestinian and Israeli students.

ESU is undertaking an initiative to gather information on various practices of Virtual Exchange and Blended Mobility from National Union of Students (NUSs). We published a common statement with ESN & EUF on the start of the negotiation between EU & Switzerland (can be found [HERE](#)). We also initiated a Erasmus+ Coalition statement against the proposed cuts on Erasmus during the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial framework.

Other policy files we have been working on are the European Disability Card (including Erasmus+ mobile disabled students under the protection of the legislation) and the Commission's package on internships and traineeships (including students/curricular traineeships in the directive).

We will soon launch a new call for the membership of the ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool, while also expanding our cooperation with QA agencies.

We have been present in new spaces (CDEDU Bureau, HE Observatory working group on student dimension, Just Transition Platform working group) while also endorsing GAIN network.

## V. Projects

In BWSEFOR2030, we have finalised the Policy Recommendations stemming from the three peer learning activities that we organised. The policy recommendations, relevant for public authorities in EHEA member states, higher education institutions and student unions will be made available soon.

In PLAR-U-PAGs, we have supported SIHO in the organisation of a peer learning activity in Ghent in December focusing on some of the Principles and Guidelines on Social Dimension, with interesting presentations coming from Flanders, Austria, ENOHE, Eurostudent, leading to insightful panel discussions.

In QA FIT, we have contributed to the two transversal papers on the future of ESGs and Quality Assurance and internationalisation, while in the TPG LRC CoRE project we have contributed to the analysis on the quality of recognition.

In the BHPS II project, we are offering counselling missions to local student unions with a pool of experts in order to support them in knowing and advocating for Bologna reforms in their higher education institutions.

In the UNICOMM project we are creating a roadmap for disabled, refugee and working students about the problems they are facing and what can be done to include them more in the student community.

In an OSF-funded project on academic freedom we have financed local and national unions of students with micro-grants. Among these are projects relating to academic freedom awareness raising from Portugal ([FredEd](#)), Romania ([EmpowerEd](#)), Albania ([Resolution on Academic Freedom](#)) and Czech Republic/Ukraine (VSB-TUO & ONEU); as well as projects relating to students at risk from Ukraine/Iran/Italy (International resolution project), Romania (EmpowerEd Lab) and Belarus (Research on the perception of academic freedom among Belarusian students). Additionally, a white paper on opportunities in the ombudsperson scheme to safeguard and promote academic freedom was written, based on an exchange with ENOHE.