



The National Unions of Students in Europe

Declaration

Luxembourg Student Declaration

Presented at the 9th European Student Convention
Luxembourg, March 2005

Preamble

ESIB - the National Unions of Students has existed since 1982 and seeks to promote the social, cultural, political and economic interests of students in Europe towards decision makers and partners at national, European and international level. ESIB currently has 50 members from 36 countries and thus represents more than 11 million students in Europe. ESIB is and has been actively involved in the construction of the European Higher Education Area.

We, the student representatives in Europe, gathered in Luxembourg at the 9th Student Convention from the 17th to the 21st of March 2005. Taking into account existing ESIB policies and looking into the future of the Bologna Process at its mid-term, we are stressing the following:

Introduction

The Bologna Process has proven to be an extraordinary initiator of changes in European higher education. Many countries have changed thoroughly their systems of Higher Education in order to reach the goals set in the Bologna declaration and in the subsequent communiqués of Prague and Berlin.

ESIB sees the Bologna Process as an extremely important tool in order to build an integrated continent. It is with high quality education for all that Europe can reach the ambitious goals for the 21st century that were set in various fora.

The measures adopted by the ministers make sense only if they are all taken together. Bologna reforms that would be “à la carte” that would vary from country to country would be meaningless. Balance between diversity and common action must be kept.

Therefore, we think that some commitments of participating states have been overlooked so far and should gain more focus in the second part of the original period.

The strong focus on the competitiveness of EHEA in the world stimulates the commodification process and brain drain, which are trends which ESIB clearly and heavily opposes. In the promotion of attractiveness of the EHEA the principle of sustainable development and cooperation with other regions of the world must be followed.

We stress that the Bologna Process must not be abused to carry out other reforms (introducing new selection mechanisms, making budgetary cuts, etc.). Other European frameworks should not be used as a substitute to the Bologna Process, in order to carry out reforms which could not be agreed upon within the Bologna Process, or which have a different political aim to the Bologna Process.

Progress and actions

On the Berlin ministerial summit ministers initiated a mid-term stocktaking exercise focussing on three priorities – the degree system, quality assurance and the recognition of degrees and periods of studies. On the basis of the ESIB survey we use this opportunity to stress student view on the development and problems related to the implementation of these three priority issues.

Degree structure

One of the goals of the Bologna Process and for the introduction of the two-cycle degree system was more flexibility within studies. We have to conclude that the present general situation in the Bologna Process countries shows that, on the contrary, due to all financial and selection obstacles regarding access to higher cycles, there are barriers between cycles that prevent free and flexible study paths.

The successful completion of the first cycle must allow for entry into the second degree. ESIB opposes any additional selection mechanism, be it special entry exams or numerus clausus. Both cycle programmes must be provided free of tuition fees. Both first cycle and second cycle degree have their own specific value, as they provide answers to different and sometimes complementary needs. There is no “normal” degree. Instead both should be equally valorised and students must be free to choose if they want to continue or stop after the first cycle.

Quality Assurance

Although we see progress in the implementation of systems of quality assurance in some Bologna participating countries, we are dissatisfied with the insufficient involvement of students. ESIB's survey clearly shows that in the vast majority of the countries students are not fully involved in all parts of internal and external quality assurance. Being full partners in Higher Education, students must always be included in all aspects and levels of quality assurance.

We express our support for the establishment of a peer review system for Quality Assurance agencies which should make clear which of them fulfil a set of quality standards and which do not. But it should be clear that the peer reviews and inclusion in a European register can only be regarded as independent and trustworthy if it is carried out under the supervision and has the ownership of the main stakeholders in higher education, namely representatives from HEIs, quality assurance agencies, governments and students.

Recognition of degrees and periods of studies

We notice with much concern that in large parts of the EHEA the Lisbon Recognition Convention has still not been duly implemented. We strive to ensure that the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention will be embedded in national legislation and applied in national and institutional recognition practices.

Many HEIs have developed a wide variety of Diploma Supplements. In the majority of cases they don't fulfil the basic elements agreed upon within the Bologna Process. Therefore we want to stress again that the Diploma Supplement should be issued automatically without students having to request it and free of charge. It should at least be issued in the language of the institution and another widely spoken European language.

The road ahead

The social dimension as priority

In the Prague and the Berlin communiqués, the social dimension of the EHEA was stressed by the ministers. For students, this aspect of the EHEA is of paramount importance because it is only with sufficient living and studying conditions for all that students can take full advantage of the improvements the Bologna Process can bring for Higher Education. It implies equality in access as well as equal chances of completion of studies. This should not only be a polite formula in communiqués, it should also be seriously considered when doing the actual reforms.

Having this in mind we stress that:

- The national support schemes for students need to be sufficient to cover the living costs of students. ESIB also stresses that grants for all are preferable to other financial support systems.
- It is important that study financing systems should be portable, to enhance mobility, and independent of parental income.
- Sufficient social support system for all students, which covers housing, health care, food and other counselling and social services should be properly implemented and enhanced to guarantee the social well-being of students.
- In the design and steering of these systems, students should form an integral part since they know student needs best.

We see the social dimension as an overarching objective of the Bologna Process. When one considers the other objectives, the social dimension should be seen as an integral part of it. Since the implementation of social dimension has not taken place significantly, we insist upon the following:

1. that the social dimension will be a priority after the Bergen conference
2. that it will be a part of the stocktaking process.

Removing all the remaining obstacles to student mobility

One of the main aims of the Bologna Process is to enhance student mobility. However, even if some structural changes have been made in order to remove obstacles to student mobility, many of them still remain.

We believe that the time is now ripe to tackle also one of the most serious obstacles: lack of financing of mobility.

We want mobility to be accessible to all students, without any discrimination. In the EHEA, student mobility must become a right, not remain a privilege.

This question grows in importance with the further integration of the continent and with the raise in the number and diversity of participating countries in the Bologna Process. Mobility is seen by the students as being reserved to only the best or the most financially well-off.

We therefore call upon the Ministers that will meet in Bergen to take the following actions:

1. To establish of a European mobility fund. That way, financial obstacles to mobility would be considered and concrete action could be proposed to the next Ministerial Conference.
2. to ease or abolish the conditions for obtaining visa and residence permits for mobile students since these still limit mobility of students between the various countries of the EHEA.
3. to establish comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries.

Cooperation between various ministerial departments

In general, we consider that making the EHEA a concrete reality for all the students in Europe brings with it the acceptance that efforts of only Higher Education actors are not sufficient. We call upon all Ministers responsible for Higher Education to consider more consistent engagement of their colleagues from other departments. Higher Education reforms should be led by an integrated policy of the whole government and not be limited by formal responsibilities of competence.

The role of students

Finally, we reaffirm that students, as competent, active and constructive partners, must be seen as one of the driving forces for changes in the field of higher education. Student participation in the Bologna process at all levels (European, national, regional and local) is one of the key conditions for the success of the Process: it is only by involving them at all levels that the implementation of the process will be made more efficient and satisfactory to all.

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe, being the representative of students on the European level, commits itself to constructively participate in the discussions on the future and in the follow-up of the Bologna Process.

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe will commit itself to continue representing and promoting the students' views on the European level.

Luxembourg, March 20th 2005