ESU written report for the CI Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting

November 2026

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1. Latest ESU events

○ 91st Board Meeting

In May, ESU's members gathered in Ponta Delgada, on the São Miguel Island in Portugal's Azores, for the **91st ESU Board Meeting**, kindly hosted by FAIRe Portugal.

The week began with two seminar days dedicated to the theme **"The Transformative Power of Higher Education in Outermost Regions"**. Participants explored the unique opportunities and challenges faced by students and higher education institutions in Europe's outermost territories, highlighting the crucial role higher education plays in fostering innovation, social cohesion, and regional development.

The Board Meeting itself then brought together student representatives from across Europe to discuss and shape ESU's policy agenda for the coming years. During the meeting, member unions adopted and updated policies on a range of key issues, including microcredentials, PhD students, quality assurance within European University Alliances, artificial intelligence and the digitalisation of higher education, the inclusion of Roma* students and the urgent need to increase access to higher education across Europe.

Members also adopted ESU's new Plan of Work, setting the organisation's priorities and strategic direction for the next mandate.

One of the most anticipated moments of the week was the election of ESU's leadership team for the upcoming mandate. Following the vote of the member unions, the newly elected leadership is as follows:

President
Daciana Pop

Vice-Presidents
Bálint Koós
Franziska Knogler

Executive Committee Members
Urszula Lis
Bryan O'Mahony
Nora Angelova
Luka Lešić
Bianca Pace
Andreé Lindahl
Katariina Järve

2. Projects

- **SPICE**

ESU continued its work coordinating the **Stakeholder Perspectives on Implementation of Commitments in the EHEA (SPICE)** project. Over the past few months, the main focus has been on developing the Bologna With Students' Eyes (BWSE) questionnaires and collecting responses from member unions. In addition, ESU contributed its perspectives to the EUA Trends questionnaire. Regular consortium meetings also continued throughout this period.

- **NewFAV2**

On September 18th, ESU's Presidency, together with representatives of national unions of students from Romania, Portugal and Ireland, took part in the workshop

"Reporting on Fundamental Values of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area" in Bucharest, Romania.

The workshop brought together stakeholders to discuss the monitoring of fundamental values across the EHEA. ESU and its member unions contributed to the student perspective.

In October, ESU took part in the **NewFAV2 Peer Learning Activity on Institutional Autonomy**, hosted by the project coordinators in Malta. Afterwards, ESU's delegates, Daciana Pop and Bianca Pace, have also participated in the 5th meeting of the BFUG Working Group on Fundamental values.

- **INSPIRE**

In October, ESU co-chaired and participated in the **5th meeting of the TPG-D**, having previously supported its preparatory phase alongside the other co-chairs.

Following the meeting, ESU contributed to the **INSPIRE Peer Learning Activity** "**From Data to Policy: Monitoring the Social Dimension of Higher Education**", presenting insights from its flagship publication, *Bologna With Students' Eyes.*

3. Latest policy and publications

BM91 Policy Documents

- Statement on micro-credentials
- Statement on doctoral students and doctoral students' rights
- Statement on AI and Digitalisation
- Resolution on Increasing Access to Higher Education
- Resolution on Roma and Travellers Students

4. ESU's Plan of Work for the 2026-2027 mandate

Alongside the newly elected representatives, ESU has adopted a new Plan of Work, outlining its key priorities and areas of focus for this year. These include:

- Widening access to higher education in the European Union
- Addressing student poverty and the rising cost of living
- Engagement and advocacy within the Bologna Follow-Up Group
- Ensuring that the student perspective is reflected in the next Ministerial Communiqué and at the Ministerial Conference
- Co-drafting the European Students' Rights Charter
- Meaningful student participation in quality assurance
- Student-centred higher education
- Quality higher education for doctoral students
- Vocational education and training
- Advocating for the higher's education role in the context of erosion of democracies across Europe
- Defending the fundamental values of higher education
- Organising the 4th Conference of the Student Bodies of the European Universities Alliances
- Continuing advocacy for democratic student representation within the European Universities Alliances
- Addressing EU enlargement and access to Erasmus+

5. ESU's work priorities since the last BFUG meeting

- **Bologna With Student Eyes**

Between April and August, ESU worked on collecting data for the six thematic areas of this edition of the Bologna With Student Eyes (BWSE) survey, covering:

1. Student Participation
2. Quality of Higher Education
3. Mobility and Internationalisation

4. Social Dimensions
5. Fundamental Values and Solidarity
6. The Bologna Commitments and the Future of the Bologna Process

ESU collected responses from **37 of the 40 countries** represented within the organisation. Following the data collection phase, the BWSE team began analysing and interpreting the findings and is currently working towards drafting the next Bologna With Students' Eyes publication.

- **The social dimension of higher education**

Over the past few months, ESU has actively engaged with European decision-makers to safeguard student welfare amidst the ongoing cost of living crisis. ESU has placed a particular focus on monitoring the shifting landscape of student housing availability and affordability across Europe, especially following recent European legislative proposals. ESU continues to advocate for the recognition of students' specific housing needs and for stronger measures to ensure access to affordable and adequate accommodation.

Furthermore, ESU continues its work on widening access to higher education and addressing the barriers faced by underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. To bring this topic closer to its membership and strengthen discussions on national and European approaches, ESU will dedicate one day of its upcoming European Students' Convention to widening access to higher education.

- **The next Multiannual Financial Framework and Erasmus+**

ESU has continued its advocacy on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028-2034, with a particular focus on securing adequate funding for Erasmus+ and other programmes supporting students and higher education. ESU has engaged with European institutions and civil society partners, advocating for an ambitious Erasmus+ budget that reflects inflation, growing participation and political commitments and the need to make learning mobility accessible to all students. A key focus has been on securing earmarked funding for the different sectors within Erasmus+ to ensure stability and predictability for stakeholders, as

well as advocating for the reintroduction of operating grants for European civil society organizations.

- **Students' Rights Charter**

ESU continued its work co-chairing the working group on the creation of a European Student Rights Charter, in cooperation with the Council of Europe. A meeting of the working group took place in Strasbourg in May, followed by further development of the draft over the summer. The draft was subsequently presented at a meeting of the CoE's CDEDU Sub-group on Higher Education.

In parallel, ESU continued its internal work on the Charter through its dedicated Task Force. The Task Force's membership was updated in September, with two new members joining. ESU is now preparing to discuss the Students' Rights Charter as one of the main themes at its upcoming event, the 52nd European Students' Convention.

- **Defending fundamental values**

Over the past few months, ESU has continued to monitor breaches of fundamental values across Europe. In recent weeks, ESU has issued public statements in response to the ongoing student protests in France, expressing solidarity with French students. ESU also continues to monitor student protests across Europe through its Student Protest Monitoring.

In parallel, ESU has been working to promote fundamental values and raise awareness of their importance among its member unions. As part of these efforts, fundamental values of the EHEA will be the central theme of the upcoming European Students' Convention.

- **The Conference of the Student Bodies of the Alliances**

ESU has been expanding its membership and revising the statutory documents of the **Conference of the Student Bodies of the Alliances** to foster a more accessible and inclusive platform for student representatives from the European University

Alliances to share their experiences, good practices and challenges, and to build a community grounded in collaboration.

- **AI and digitalisation**

Following an internal survey gathering the perspectives, experiences and national and institutional regulations of National Unions of Students, ESU issued the statement on AI and Digitalisation in June. The statement calls for coordinated approaches to AI in higher education, meaningful student participation in its governance and safeguards for student rights, data protection and equitable access, while highlighting uneven implementation across Europe.

- **Doctoral students**

Building on the survey of over 2800 replies from doctoral students across the EHEA, ESU, together with its Task Force on Doctoral Students, has developed a statement on doctoral students and doctoral students' rights. The statement calls for adequate and predictable funding, fair employment conditions and full social protection, alongside quality supervision, intellectual property and safeguards for academic freedom and well-being, while stressing the need for meaningful doctoral student representation in governance and quality assurance.

6. ESU upcoming events

Upcoming events	Topic	When/Where
The 52nd European Students' Convention	Strengthening fundamental values, empowering students and widening access	October 23-27 in Galway, Ireland
The annual training of ESU's quality assurance pool of student experts	Quality assurance	October 20-23 in Trnava, Slovakia
The 92nd Board Meeting of the	Putting students at the center, improving the quality of higher	November 22-28 in Yerevan,

European Students' Union	education	Armenia