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To: Bologna Follow-Up Group

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## **Update of the European Students' Union (ESU) for the Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009 in Stockholm, Sweden**

### **Introduction**

This is an update of the European Students' Union activities produced for the Bologna Follow-Up Group held in Stockholm, Sweden on the 28<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2009. This overview covers the main activities developed by ESU since the BFUG in Prague on 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> of March. For any further clarification, please contact [ligia@esu-online.org](mailto:ligia@esu-online.org) or [andrea@esu-online.org](mailto:andrea@esu-online.org).

### **Internal activities**

*1 – European Training Conference 2009: »European Higher Education Area 2020: making it a concrete reality! « and 56th Board Meeting of the European Students' Union*

Only days before the Ministerial Conference in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, ESU in cooperation with its member unions VVS and FEF from Belgium hosted the **European Training Conference** on **“European Higher Education Area 2020: making it a concrete reality”** and subsequently its 56<sup>th</sup> assembly of delegates in the **Board Meeting**.

Looking at the two sided reality that, on one hand, the Bologna Process carried out massive reforms for higher education as it has never been seen before in the world; that through the involvement of governments, international organisations and the representatives of the key stakeholders, the higher education institutions, students and staff, the concept of an EHEA reaching 46 countries in Europe has been discussed, its core principles, foundations and instruments have been laid out and the lives of millions of students have been changed. However, on the other hand, whilst significant progress has been made since its inception, it is widely accepted that the aims of the Bologna Process will not be fully achieved by 2010. Countries have been selective in the implementation of the action lines of the Bologna Process, undermining the potential for change in a sustainable and effective manner. On this basis ESU decided to gather student representatives from its members from all over Europe for a

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training on the multiple aspects of the Bologna Process and to serve as a platform to exchange experience on implementation practices on the national and institutional level and to look into the future and jointly exploring the question how, from a student point of view, the Bologna Process goals can be reached. Through this, this seminar allowed for building the students' critical and constructive input towards the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial conference.

Being held just after the release of the **Bologna With Student Eyes 2009** publication, the findings of this survey were presented and discussed. Key among the publications' conclusions was that, while progress has been made on implementing 'structural' reforms such as the 3-cycle system, content reforms such as those relating to mobility, the social dimension and student participation have been largely neglected which endangers the Bologna Process being revealed as a superficial redesign of higher education structures in Europe rather than a transformation of the whole academic and learning paradigm. The discussion concluded that delivering the Bologna vision requires crucially the developing national action plans for implementation, delivering on the commitments made in terms of the social dimension, setting and achieving a concrete mobility target, and increasing access, equity and participation at all levels of learning. Furthermore, the launching event sent a strong message to Europe's education ministers not to attempt a 'cover-up' of implementation inadequacies by finding new and superficial attractions to draw attention away from the core components of Bologna at next week's ministerial conference.

In the 56th Board Meeting, the representatives of the national unions of students being members of ESU adopted a strong [statement on rankings](#), stating that ESU opposes the development of rankings and "transparency" tools in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and calling upon Ministers responsible for Higher Education (HE) gathering in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve to concentrate their efforts on quality assurance and true information for students, since using a list of mainly quantitative indicators to develop rankings and classification does not reflect the quality of a higher education institution. Furthermore, experience reveals that rankings and classification are part of the marketisation agenda for higher education. European student unions did not agree with the introduction of tools which encourage an agenda, in which students are seen as consumers instead of stakeholders. Under rankings and classification, the rise and fall of the reputation of an HEI gives room for adjustments in funding and tuition fees. ESU opposes the trends towards the creation of a higher education market and previews that the social dimension goals will be undermined by a European shifting of focus towards rankings because the social dimension of higher education is highly complex and depending on the national context. A ranking, let alone done on the European level encourages HEIs to focus on more easily comparable fields such as research and to compromise

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on goals such as enlarging access which are a priority to students since the very beginning of the Bologna Process.

On a more internal note, the members adopted the reports of all of ESU's elected representatives as well as the financial report of the organization; since this Board Meeting marked the end of a political mandate, the Board elected its **new political representatives in the executive and in the academic affairs committee** for the academic year 2009/10:

- **Chairperson** - Ligia Deca of Romania
- **Vice-Chairperson** – Allan Päll of Estonia
- **Executive Committee** – Andrea Blaettler of Switzerland, Alma Joensen of Iceland, Bert Vandenkendelaere of Belgium
- **Academic Affairs Committee** – Daniela Bartolo of Malta, Love Hansson of Sweden, Kristine Bak Nielsen of Denmark, Robert Santa of Romania

Furthermore new members were elected into the

- **Social Affairs Committee** - Yonatan Green of Israel and Igors Grigorjevs of Latvia (the mandate of Jenny Björk of Finland and Inge Gielis of Belgium was prolonged)
- **Student Union Development Committee** – Valentina Boskovic of Serbia and Matey Hovocin of Slovakia
- **Committee on Internal Development** – Daniela Cassar of Malta was appointed in June by the Executive Committee (the mandate of David Troxler of Switzerland was prolonged)

Established in the last Board Meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, the members of ESU elected **SYL**, the National Union of university students of Finland, as the **chair of the ESU Working Group on the third cycle and the link between higher education and research**. This working group will build up on the unions' knowledge on the respective issue and initiate it as a continuous working area within ESU. As a part of their activities, the working group will in cooperation with the Executive Committee and the Academic Affairs Committee organize the next **Board Meeting Seminar being held in Krakow, Poland on 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> of November 2009**.

Looking at the membership which forms the basis of ESU, the national unions of students welcomed **LUS**, the Luxembourg University Students as a new candidate member and **IFMSA**, the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations as a new associated member.

The next Board Meeting will be held from 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> of November in Poland. As for the subsequent Board Meetings, our national union of students in Spain (CREUP) and Israel (NUIS) were elected to host the Board Meeting 58 (spring 2010) and 59 (autumn 2010) with their respective seminars.

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## 2 – World Conference on Higher Education +10, 2009 and Global Student Day

Ten years after the first world conference on Higher Education held 1998 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris representatives of UN member countries from all over the world as well as diverse academics and international and national stakeholder organization representatives convened from 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> of July again in Paris to discuss the development within the global higher education arena since 1998 and to define common global goals for the next decade to come.

ESU was one of totally 13 official partners in the event and has been highly involved in the preparation work within the programme committee with a special focus lying on the enhancement of student participation within the conference. Particular emphasis has therefore also been placed on facilitating an unprecedented level of cooperation among the different regional student platforms, creating a unified voice of the global students' representatives. This is reflected in the [Global Student Statement](#) agreed by student groups in January in a preparatory meeting organized by ESU in cooperation with EI and UNESCO. This global student statement provided the basis of the student input into the World Conference.

ESU's chairperson Ligia Deca also represented the students in the drafting committee for the **World Conference Communiqué**. It can be seen in the latter that the student voice was heard: the communiqué is crucially stressing the **place of higher education as 'a public good and a strategic imperative'**, and adds that, 'higher education must be a matter of responsibility and economic support of all governments.' This recognition comes at a critical time for the sector, with a series of threats to higher education funding in the face of the current economic crisis, and the ever-increasing advancement of the privatisation/marketisation agenda. Furthermore, the communiqué raises the attention to the **interlink between quality, equity and access** and calls upon member states to, 'encourage women's access,' as well as 'guarantee equal access to under-represented groups.' The communiqué also takes the first tentative steps towards a full embrace of student-centred learning by calling upon governments to develop 'more flexible entry pathways and assure better recognition of prior learning and work experience', which marks a move away from a view of higher education as merely an economic tool for creating the workforce of the future, and towards an appreciation of higher education's intrinsic value, stating that higher education institutions should 'increase their interdisciplinary focus and promote critical thinking and active citizenship'.

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On a third note, students saw with satisfaction that the value of **student participation** was for once given clear attention stating that students should be given a voice in the governance of higher education at all levels' with a call for member states to ensure active student participation, as well as to safeguard freedom of expression and the right of free association, and to provide adequate student services.

On the day subsequent to the World Conference, the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, the global student representatives gathered for a one day global student meeting agreeing on further and intensified cooperation.

### *3 – Council of Europe Study Session on Quality Assurance and the European Students' Experts' Pool*

Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of July ESU organized a study session at the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. With this study session ESU also further established its experts' pool further defining one important pillar of it which is the pool of quality assurance experts.

The 23 participants were selected according to the criteria of a certain level of quality assurance knowledge and experience and with due regard to gender and regional balance. The group consisted of an inspiring mixture of relative newly involved student representatives within quality assurance and very experienced student review experts. An important aspect within this study session therefore constituted the **sharing and exchanging of knowledge and experience within quality assurance**.

These participants were given an **intensive training on internal and external quality assurance** encompassing the learning outcome of both theoretically analyzing as well as practically working with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) and acting as a member of an institutional audit panel. Furthermore, a focus was given to the competences of active listening and critically asking of questions in order to equip the European student expert pool members with the necessary skills for their activity within the pool.

Lastly, the participants were encouraged to present and discuss their views on the **further development of the European Students' Experts' Pool**. The fruitful outcomes of these sessions will feed into the political planning of the development of the European Students' Experts' Pool.

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#### 4 – ESCBI project (*Enhancing the Student Contribution to Bologna Implementation*)

The ESCBI project has several main foci:

- To give an accurate assessment of the state of implementation of Bologna Process reforms as expounded in the London Communiqué, in all EU member states, as well as nearly all Bologna signatories, as felt by students;
- To allow the student movement to develop a common strategy towards the reform priorities outlined by the Louvain ministerial communiqué set to be issued in 2009;
- To train student representatives so as to give them the capacity to actively contribute towards the implementation of reforms at a national level;
- To produce a comprehensive picture of the effect the Bologna Process has had on Higher Education systems, students and society since its inception. This analysis will be done from objective (What has changed?) and subjective (Have systems changed for the better for students?) perspectives.

This project is funded by the European Commission and was started in November 2008. In its frame, ESU realizes most of its concrete aims towards the 2010 milestone of the Bologna Process:

- **Training material** was prepared for the above described European Training Conference April 2009 including training modules on the priorities of the Bologna Process, in particular the priorities set by the London Communiqué and discussion inputs about the future of the Bologna Process after 2010.
- **Discussion Materials for Ministerial Conference** - A reader for the conference was developed, with a compilation of relevant articles about the Bologna Process in 2010, an introduction of the main speakers, the plenary and workshop sessions
- **[Bologna With Student Eyes 2009](#)** - Following our surveys in 2005 and 2007, ESU on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2009 again published its assessment of the implementation of the Bologna Process from a students' perspective. The survey was based on a questionnaire, filled in by national unions of students in the Bologna member states. The questionnaire data was cross-referenced with other major surveys on the topic and research data that is available on the topic.
- **[European Stakeholders' Forum 2009](#)** – On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September ESU organized a European Stakeholders' Forum titled "From Leuven to the future: Bologna looks different with student eyes". Angele Attard from Education International Christoph Gwosć from Eurostudent analyzed the chapters of the Bologna With Student Eyes 2009 publication on the social dimension and on mobility and in a joint discussion with a respondent from the side of ESU elaborated the road

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forward for these two student priorities. In a second round, Andreu Mas-Colell from the European Research Council commented on the BWSE findings on the third cycle and together with Gerard Madill from the European University Association investigated into the possibilities of life long learning understood as a general educational framework rather than a separate part of higher education. The aim was a critical analysis of the student perspective of the Bologna Process as laid out in BWSE 2009. In a closing plenary, Barbara Nolan introduced the point of view on the Process after Leuven from the perspective of the European Commission and some key questions were discussed jointly with all the experts present.

- **Bologna At The Finish Line** Shortly before the Anniversary Ministerial Conference in March 2010 ESU will host the European Student Summit from the 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> of March in Vienna. Within this event, the 2010 publication Bologna at the Finish Line will be presented to the student audience and the press. This will constitute of a transversal analysis of the effects of the Bologna Process between 1999 and 2010 and a more future oriented perspective on the student priorities for a real student centred European Higher Education Area until 2020. Bologna at the Finish Line will be based on a multiple methodological approach consisting of desk research on all the working areas within the Bologna Process and interviews with alumni from the student union environment on the national and European level as well as external experts from other stakeholder organizations and/or national governments, researchers or journalists to analyze the progress of the process in the last ten years. Thirdly, a new survey on the student perspectives for the future developments of the Bologna Process will be issued. Basing on these three data sources, Bologna at the Finish Line shall draw a comprehensive picture of the Bologna Process in 2010, the initial deadline for the EHEA.
- **Faces Of Bologna** - A short documentary video of around 20 minutes will be created to give the Bologna Process a more human face. In the video, students will be interviewed about their perception of the Bologna Process and it will be attempted to visualise their modern study environment. This documentary will be presented to the student audience in the European Student Summit as well as to the ministerial audience within the Ministerial Conference 2010.

### *5 – Regional equity trainings*

During the past months ESU has organized 3 regional trainings within the frame of our “Equity in higher education” project. They aimed at empowering student representatives active in the ESU member national unions of students to be pro-active in the fields of fostering equity in higher education, spotting discrimination and fighting against it at the institutional and national levels, gender mainstreaming strategies etc. These trainings took place in Timisoara, Romania (6-8<sup>th</sup> of March

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2009), Tallin, Estonia (2-4<sup>th</sup> of April 2009) and Vienna, Austria (12-14<sup>th</sup> of June 2009). The total number of student representatives trained is around 100 from the side of most of the 47 ESU members.

### *6 – Gender equality handbook*

This [publication](#) addresses the issue of gender equality within higher education and student unions. It is meant as a tool for student unions to be able to fight gender inequalities in their internal structures and to efficiently promote gender equality in higher education.

## **ESU's contribution to the Bologna Process**

### *1 – Participation in the follow-up activities*

- Advisory Committee to monitor the Independent Assessment of the Bologna Process, elected by the BFUG at the BFUG meeting in Sarajevo.
- Activities linked to the preparation of the EQAR evaluation within the EQAR Executive Board and the E4 group
- Intense feedback within the process of developing the new BFUG Workplan

### *2 – Starting our new "Time for a New Paradigm in Education: Student Centered Learning (T4SCL)" project, in cooperation with Education International.*

The aim of this project is to increase the understanding of student centered learning tools and elements among the policy makers and student representatives at both the national and the European level, while opening the debate to stakeholders through sharing good practices and research. The project will produce a student centred learning toolkit aimed at increasing the European awareness and understanding on changing the learning paradigm from teacher centred to student centred. The good practice examples and the innovative approaches will create a better European approach on student centred learning as a fundamental pre-condition to an European area for lifelong learning.

Also the project will empower students and staff representatives to be active partners in changing the learning paradigm from teacher to student centred, by organising trainers for a better understanding of the student centred learning tools, methods and mechanisms.

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The project will run between November 2009 and October 2010 and EI will act as ESU's partners in this project. The aim of ESU is to include the results of the project as possible in the work of the Bologna Follow-up Group on matters related to student centred learning.

### *3 – The joint EI-ESU-EUA working group on mobility*

The three organisations EUA, EI and ESU have decided to join efforts and to establish a Joint Mobility Working Group with the following aims:

- Contribute to the BFUG discussion on indicators used for measuring and monitoring mobility, by proposing a set of jointly agreed indicators, also with regards to the Global Dimension of the EHEA and conditions for in- and outgoing international mobility
- Elaborate theme and content for a joint mobility conference under the Spanish/Belgian EU Presidency
- Explore areas of common interest for the three organisations, with the aim of drafting a 'common set of mobility principles', which could have a structure similar to the European Standards and Guidelines on QA.
- Search for funding to test the 'common set of mobility principles' in higher education institutions.

A first result of our joint work is the mobility input paper for the debate on the definition and measuring of mobility towards the 20% by 2020 EHEA benchmark.

### *4 – QA Experts pool*

In July ESU has launched the student trainers' pool consisting of 13 young people, among them alumni of ESU and the national unions of students and ESU elected representatives, all experienced in trainings and higher education policy. ESU Trainers pool was created with the aim to professionalize ESU trainings and to meet the demand of the national unions of students, planned in ESU projects as well as requested by ESU members and other organizations. ESU trainers' pool is a part of the general ESU Experts pool, which was launched in early autumn this year. Apart from ESU trainers' pool, Experts' pool consists of student experts participating in the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the European University Association or other quality assurance evaluations of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies as well as other missions.

ESU has nominated students as members of the ENQA review panels for national quality assurance agencies in Bulgaria, Poland, Spain, Romania and France. Also, ESU has nominated student evaluators for institutional evaluations, organized by various national quality assurance bodies.

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Also, ESU has performed the first full evaluation of a national quality assurance agency (ARACIS). The review assessed the performance of ARACIS on three fields. First, the organisation's mission and strategy to achieve this mission are assessed in the general context of the Romanian higher education system. Secondly, the performance of ARACIS is assessed based on the 'European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education' and the 'European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies' (parts two and three of the ESG). Thirdly, a specific analysis of ARACIS is made with regards to student participation, based on the ESG as well as ESU's expertise in the field.

### Upcoming activities

*1 – 18<sup>th</sup> European Students' Convention on "Social Dimension – the lost Dimension" on 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> of October in Stockholm, Sweden*

Our next European Students' Convention in Stockholm will be jointly organized by ESU and SFS, the Swedish national union of students and will address the **social dimension**. It will feature a reality check of what amongst the social dimension goals has been reached and what has been terribly neglected only; furthermore highlight the gender equality perspective on higher education and question the adequacy of European student support systems. As a central topic we will explore Student financing and the effects of the economic crisis on the student population, thus presenting the outcomes of our survey amongst our member unions about their perception on the effects of the crisis.

*2 – Board Meeting Seminar on the third cycle and the link between higher education and research on 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> of November and Board Meeting 57 on 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> of November in Krakow, Poland*

ESU will hold its 57<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting and Board Meeting Seminar in Krakow, Poland in November 2009. The seminar will address the topic of the third **cycle and the link between higher education and research**. Within this framework, we will discuss the link between higher education and research and with this between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. It will put forward for discussion the impact of the Bologna Process on the third cycle and how curricula competences can be defined in a balanced manner between the goal of employable third cycle graduates and a rewarding first step into a research career. Furthermore, the status of doctoral students in European HEIs will be explored and the questions addressed how more equity in access

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and success can be reached for the third cycle and what are meaningful financing schemes for doctoral studies. In the consecutive 57<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting the European Students' Union's members will discuss and define the ESU 2010 plan of work and the corresponding budget for the upcoming year, as well as discuss policy, membership and statutory issues.

### *3 – European Student Summit in Vienna, Austria on 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> of March 2010*

This event will mark the 10 year anniversary of the Bologna Process, while gathering approximately 200 participants, and it will aim to:

- gather European student representatives from all over Europe from both ESU member and associate member association as well as from other European umbrella organizations of students to discuss concrete student objectives for the Bologna Process in the next decade.
- present a student declaration towards the ministerial conference in Vienna and Budapest.
- present the ESU 2010 publication 'Bologna at the Finish Line' to the student audience and to the Ministerial Conference.
- present the ESU documentary 'Faces of Bologna', which is aiming at giving the Bologna Process a human face from the student perspective, to the student audience and to the Ministerial Conference.

The event enjoys the support of the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research and of the European Commission funds through the ESCBI project.

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