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## Update on the European Student Union's activities

### Introduction

This update covers the main activities conducted by ESU since the BFUG meeting in Madrid, between February 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>. We will also have a short review of some of our main upcoming activities for this autumn, that tackle issues important in the Bologna process as well. For any further clarification on these, please send an email to [robert@esu-online.org](mailto:robert@esu-online.org) or [magnus@esu-online.org](mailto:magnus@esu-online.org).

### Major activities

#### **European Students Summit, Vienna (07.03 – 12.03 - 2010)**

Conducted at the same time as the ministerial summit in Vienna/Budapest, the ESS was meant to gather the opinions of student representatives from across the continent with the occasion of 10 years since the start of the Bologna process.

With this occasion, ESU launched its publication **Bologna at the Finish Line** which was meant to review Bologna implementation from a students perspective for the entire duration of the Bologna process implementation work.

The publication followed in the footpath of ESU's own Bologna stocktaking exercises from 2005 to 2009 called Bologna With Student Eyes (BWSE), but was broader in both scope and extent. The publication is both critical of Bologna implementation and analytic in trying to bring together various views in a comprehensive view on the whole evolution of the process.

With this publication, we tried to reflect the experiences of some of the people who have stayed close to the political decision-making process surrounding Bologna and who have had the chance to witness the development of the process over time, so the publication also reviewed some of the experiences of important decision-makers.

Also, ESU launched its documentary **Faces of Bologna**, which aimed to have a non-political outlook on the Bologna process by gathering interviews made by students in several European countries.

### **Board Meeting and Seminar - BM 58, Madrid (03.05 – 08.05 - 2010)**

The 58th Board Meeting seminar of the European Students' Union brought together about 150 student representatives from 36 countries discussing how to reconcile the funding of higher education current and future policy with the social dimension.

Participants reported that the financial crisis impacted European countries differently affecting funding for teaching, research and student support schemes. Some countries witnessed serious cutbacks resulting in stops on hiring, pay-freezes or even redundancies. Other countries have witnessed transformations of student grants into loan schemes. A review of funding schemes of higher education institutions throughout Europe revealed that institutions are receiving public support increasingly on an output-based and competitive basis as well as are under pressure to diversify their funding sources. All of these, of course, have meant that little onus has been placed on adequate access levels of education, or on making educational attainment accessible to students from all backgrounds.

To address the mentioned challenges in a sustainable manner, participants concluded that a proper balance needs to be established between financing, social dimension and quality assurance, because education will only be meaningful to a broader student population if it is of high quality. At the same time, participants considered sustainability to imply that all stakeholders in higher education need to be involved in coming to an agreement on the proper balance between these three pillars.

The event was followed-up by the ESU Board Meeting proper, which included elections for several ESU committees. Among the people that were elected, ESU can count on a new chair, in the person of Bert Vandenkandelaere (Belgium), a new vice-chair in the person of Allan Pall (Estonia), as well as a new executive team that includes Rasa Cincyte (Lithuania), Robert Santa (Romania) and Karina Ufert (Lithuania).

Also, ESU has a new Academic Affairs Committee that includes Andrea Blaettler (Switzerland), George Charonis (United Kingdom), Monika Maljukov (Estonia) and Magnus Malnes (Norway).

### **Conference on Student Centred Learning – Bucharest (20.05 – 23.05, 2010)**

The Bucharest conference on Student Centred Learning took place in Bucharest, Romania, from May 20<sup>th</sup> to May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010. The conference proceedings focused on how Student Centred Learning can become a reality. Furthermore, the conclusions of a desk research and survey analysis conducted by the European Students' Union (ESU) and Education International (EI) were presented to the participants. The conference was the first event of the joint ESU/ EI "Time for a New Paradigm: Student Centered Learning" (T4SCL) project.

Gathering 70 participants from over 20 countries, the main idea behind the Bucharest conference was to launch the T4SCL project, and to initiate a debate on the topic of Student Centred Learning between staff and students. In order to give a solid basis for this debate, ESU and EI launched both a desk research report and a survey analysis on the issue of student centred learning. The two reports were prepared by a mixed ESU-EI research team.

The outcomes of the two publications set both the tone and the structure of the debates and workshops that took place for the four day duration of the event. In order to maximize the interactive nature of the

conference, every panel was followed up by discussions and the workshops were followed-up by an interactive high-speed debate after the reporting session of the conference.

In the end, the conference resulted in a mix of conclusions which we have already disseminated to the BFUG and which concluded that greater work needs to be made at grass roots level, often within institutions, towards improving the use of flexibility tools and modifying pedagogical practices. Participants also agreed on the importance of student consultation, cooperation between students and staff, and on the proper allotment of resources into teaching and learning activities, which have tended to lose clout to research in the past couple of years.

One particularly interesting conclusion, in the light of links between SCL and other Bologna action lines, was that Bologna tools have the power to increase the flexibility of the educational system in a way that is conducive and supportive to having functional student centred learning. The issue of Bologna was raised several times during the conference, often as a valuable source of supportive tools for SCL implementation. Such examples include, among others ECTS (which was deemed as an aid to curricular flexibility and mobility), Qualifications Frameworks (which were deemed to help students have a better understanding on how to structure their learning paths), mobility (sharing examples of good practice) and Quality Assurance (giving students the guarantee that their learning is certified in terms of quality and also being a tool that can come to include provisions on educational aspects of academic life).

### Upcoming activities

#### **20<sup>th</sup> European Students Convention- Leuven, Belgium (14.10 – 17.10, 2010)**

The European Student Union's 20th European Student Convention is scheduled to take place in Leuven, Belgium, in October this year. The event, one of the largest organized by ESU this year, will include work directed at planing ESU's long-term vision and strategies, but will also follow-up on this year's plan of work.

The main direction, however, follows up the *Time for a New Paradigm in Education: Student Centred Learning (T4SCL)* project co-organized by ESU and Education International (EI), and will include the launch of a SCL development toolkit and discussions involving stakeholders and researchers that have worked on the topic before. On the SCL focused part of the program, there will also be participants representing staff unions, to help build up the dialogue existing on this topic between students and staff even further. One of the scopes of the event is in fact to have a final and comprehensive debate on what student centred learning is and on what are the presets for its proper implementation at institutional level.

We aim at the participants, who will originate from a variety of countries, to exchange views, examples of good practice and experiences on educational process issues.

The main expected outcome is a greater understanding by participants of the processes that influence the development of learner centred education, as well as a concrete set of recommendations that can feed into this development work.

### **Board Meeting Seminar for BM 59 – Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, Israel – (31.10 – 06.11, 2010)**

The beautiful cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv will be hosts to this autumn's ESU Board Meeting seminar, with the theme being Quality Assurance. The Board Meeting seminar will take place for a duration of 2 days, and will include over 100 participants from Europe and the Middle East.

The purpose of the seminar is to increase cooperation in the area of quality assurance between ESU, national student unions and other relevant stakeholders. The idea behind the project is to discuss the possibilities of cooperation in the sense of fostering quality culture rather than focusing exclusively on the bureaucratic process of quality assurance as often perceived today.

Among the operational outcomes we expect, we believe that the project will have a positive impact in the following ways:

1. Enhancing QA policy work on the basis of the content cooperation between interested stakeholders.
2. By boosting the internal capacity of student unions to work together to enhance quality in practical terms on the topic of QA.
3. By fostering increased cooperation in work on Quality Assurance between stakeholders from the Quality Assurance Arena of the European Higher Education Area.

With this occasion, ESU will also organize elections for several committees and will hence partially elect a new team of responsables on social and student union development issues.