

BRUSSELS STUDENT DECLARATION

ESIB - The National Unions of Students in Europe is and has been actively involved in the construction of the European Higher Education Area. So far discussion have focused on adjusting education systems but creating a genuine European Higher Education Area requires more than educational, structural and institutional changes.

We have long advocated the inclusion of the social dimension of higher education in the discussion on the European level. Whilst not having been mentioned initially in the Bologna Declaration, the increasing involvement and participation of students in the Bologna process has highlighted the importance of the social issues and led to their inclusion in the Prague Communiqué. The economic processes on the global level have emphasised the need for a socially sound and inclusive European Higher Education Area even more.

ESIB sees the social dimension as the struggle for the creation of democratic and inclusive higher education and the struggle for the promotion of student well-being. A democratic and inclusive higher education means allowing people to access it on an equitable basis. The promotion of student well-being means creating a social environment that guarantees all the necessary provisions to ensure that the students are able to excel in their studies and to become active citizens.

In considering these social issues ESIB in its discussions has prioritised several areas of importance.

Creating the preconditions for an inclusive higher education requires the developments of a coherent social educational policy on two levels: before higher education and during higher education. On the first level governments should guarantee equal access to higher education by assuring that everybody acquires basic core skills in prior high quality and qualifying schooling, by eliminating such explicit selection mechanisms as *numeri clausi* and entrance exams and by ensuring that all other selection mechanisms used are not discriminatory and are not based on any other grounds than acquired knowledge. In addition government should be mindful of non traditional routes to higher education.

Students should be regarded as a core part of higher education, not as consumers that purchase a product. To view higher education as a commodity is to undermine the social role that all levels of education confer to both the students and society. We are strongly concerned with the process of commodification of higher education as evidenced by the negotiations on the General Agreement of Trade in Services. Education is a human right and human rights can never be tradable.

In adopting a competitive approach to higher education the social benefit systems must not suffer. Cooperation rather than competition should be the guiding principle for the enhancement of student well-being and good practices.

Mobility is one of the corner stones of the European Higher Education Area. However, if social dimensions are not taken into account, mobility will increase the present social inequalities. Mobility should not lead to a brain drain but should encourage the exchange and circulation of students. Obstacles to mobility are not just of an academic nature. Social, economical and political obstacles must also be removed.

A prerequisite for mobility is a functioning framework for recognition aided by a mutual recognition of accreditation systems.

The provision of Life Long Learning in higher education should be developed in a way to have an impact on the democratic development of society and individual personal growth and this is as least as important as the relevance for the labour market. There is a need for a more flexible and borderless higher education to cope with new challenges of Life Long Learning.

As the student representative at the European level, ESIB is the actor in the European Higher Education Area with the best knowledge of the issues that concern students in their daily lives. ESIB stresses that the social dimension is not important only in the perspective of the Bologna process, but is essential for education as such. ESIB has and will continue to reiterate its claims for the social dimension to be properly included.

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