

ESIB

The National Unions of Students in Europe

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Bologna, 19th June 1999

Bologna Students Joint Declaration

The National Unions of Students welcome the intensification of cooperation between European governments on the level of higher education. We think that the "Europe of Knowledge", the development of the cultural dimension are indeed a priority in order to build a common Europe shared by the people.

Therefore, we would like to express some comments about the Bologna declaration:

1) First of all, **we do not think that European institutions of higher education lack "competitiveness"** at the international level. European higher education institutions, even if they often need to be reformed and helped through public funding, do provide a high quality education that allows European students to be competitive on the international labour market. Still, the best way to improve the attractiveness and the quality of European higher education would be to increase public fundings.

2) We are firmly committed to a **model of quality education open to the largest number of students**. It is a duty of Europe and European governments to permanently raise the level of knowledge of its entire population. This will make the European cultural model even more attractive. Therefore, **the declarations must not be a means to install any kind of limitation of the access to higher education**. Nor should it have the consequence to expell students from higher education.

3) We think that the **diversity** of the higher education system can also be an advantage at the international level. The attractiveness of a model does not only depends on its uniformity. The diversity of Higher Education systems in Europe is not the cause of their "lack of attractiveness".

The problem of « attractiveness » of European higher education institutions towards countries coming from countries outside the EU and EEA could be solved for example through a **more liberal visa policy towards students of these countries**.

Besides the simplification of administrative procedures, a real policy in order to attract foreign students is to provide them with **scholarships**, like it is done in Canada or the United States.

4) In order to build the "European space of Higher Education", **mobility should become a right for all students**. There is a fear that mobility experience will only create an new students elite. Thus, wider population of students should have access to mobility. This may be achieved through simpler comparisons between higher education systems, through the extensive use of the **ECTS, the diploma supplement, teaching of foreign languages** and the **intensification of the cooperation between institutions of higher education**. This also a means to understand better the diversity of European diplomas.

However, two other points should be stressed:

-Obviously, the main obstacle to students mobility remains the weak number and low level of the amount of mobility scholarships. Studying abroad is expensive and we cannot accept that it is reserved to a social elite. **Governments should consider it as a priority to give all the means necessary in order to make mobility a right for students and build a real open area of higher education**.

- International recognition of diplomas and parts of the studies is still an obstacle to students mobility. We urge governments and higher education institutions to show political will in order to negotiate and implement clear and workable **systems of equivalences between European degrees**. An ad hoc commission should be created, with the participation of representatives of governments, institutions of higher education, the European Commission and students.

Finally, we would like to state that **we deeply regret that the students were not involved with the drafting of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations** and to the definition of their objectives eventhough we are one of the most important populations concerned by the potential reforms. Transparency is needed in the process. Otherwise it will only create unnecessary opposition and confusion. We hope that in future discussions, national unions of students will be associated on the national level and that ESIB, which represents 37 national unions from 31 countries will be consulted at the European level.

Declaration first signed by the following national unions of students :

UDU : Italy
UNEF-ID, FAGE : France
LSVb : The Netherlands
SYL, SAMOK : Finland
DSF : Denmark
UNES/VSS : Switzerland
FEF, VVS : Belgium
CSC : Croatia
KSU : Malta
UNEL : Luxembourg
NUS : United Kingdom
LSS : Lithuania
StL : Norway
LSA : Latvia
HOOK : Hungary
SSU : Slovenia