

Göteborg Student Declaration

25 March 2001

Preamble

We, the student representatives in Europe, gathered in Göteborg at the Student Göteborg Convention from the 22nd to the 25th of March 2001. Here we adopted the following declaration on the future of the Bologna Process. ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe is and has been actively involved in the construction of the European Higher Education Area.

In June 1999, ESIB and its members, the national unions of students had to invite themselves to the Ministerial meeting on "A European Higher Education Area" in Bologna. Two years later, at the Prague Summit, ESIB is a keynote speaker. The growing recognition of the student input in the process is the result of a strong commitment of European students to promote a high quality, accessible and diverse higher education in Europe.

Introduction

ESIB sees the Bologna process as the crucial step towards a Europe without boundaries for its citizens. A European higher education area should include all European students on an equal basis. The creation of this area is a common responsibility of all European countries and should take into account the political and socio-economic differences in Europe. The reason for creating a European higher education area is the improvement of all national higher education systems, by spreading good practices and promoting cooperation and solidarity between the European states.

The social implications

Although the Bologna Declaration pointed out the basic aspects of the European dimension in higher education, it failed to address the social implications the process has on students. Higher education enables students to acquire the skills and the knowledge they need further in life, both personally and professionally. The social and civic contributions must be present as the primary functions of the higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are important actors in civic society; therefore all members of the higher education community should be involved. Students therefore are not consumers of a tradable education service, and as a consequence it is the governments' responsibility to guarantee that all citizens have equal access to higher education, regardless of their social background. This means providing students with adequate funding in the form of study grants and the higher education institutions with enough funding to exercise their public tasks.

The Higher Education Area

As stated earlier, accessible higher education of a high quality is of utmost importance for a democratic European society. Accessibility and diversity have traditionally been the cornerstones of European education and should remain so in the future. Next to this and to ensure that all programmes of higher education institutions are compatible and exchangeable, a system of credits based on workload should be implemented in the whole of Europe. A common European framework of criteria for accreditation and a compatible system of degrees is needed, in order to make sure that credits accumulated in different countries or at different institutions are transferable and lead to a recognizable degree. A two-tier degree system should guarantee free and equal access for all students and should not lead to the exclusion of students on other than academic grounds. To guarantee and improve the quality of higher education, a strong European cooperation of the national quality assurance systems is needed. Accreditation, being a certification of a programme, takes into account, among other criteria, the quality assurance process and should be used as a tool to promote quality.

A European higher education area promoting improvement and cooperation requires physical mobility of students, teaching staff and researchers. Mobility is also a way to promote cultural understanding and tolerance. Obstacles to mobility exist not only in the academic world. Social, economical and political obstacles must also be removed.

Governments should guarantee foreign students the same legal rights as the students in the hosting country and higher education institutions should take the responsibility to provide students with mobility programmes.

The creation of a genuine European higher education area as outlined above will lead to expanded mobility, higher quality and the increased attractiveness of European education and research. The measures taken in the Bologna process are only a first step towards transparency. The provision of general information must be encouraged. To improve the level of information Europe needs a fully implemented use of a Diploma Supplement and the creation of a readily accessible database with all relevant higher education information.

The role of students

Finally, it must be stressed that students, as competent, active and constructive partners, must be seen as one of the driving forces for changes in the field of education. Student participation in the Bologna process is one of the key steps towards permanent and more formalised student involvement in all decision making bodies and discussion for a dealing with higher education on the European level.

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe, being the representative of students on the European level, must be included in the future follow-up of the Bologna declaration.

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe will commit itself to continue representing and promoting the students' views on the European level.

<http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de>