



ESU turns 30!

Fighting for student rights since 1982





IMPRINT

30th Anniversary
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European Students' Union
Rue de la Sablonnière 20
1000 Bruxelles, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 502 2362
secretariat@esu-online.org

Editing & Proofreading by
Vanja Ivosevic, Allan Päll,
Rok Primožič, Marianne
Slegers and Martina Vu-
kasovic.

Proofreading by
Aengus Ó Maoláin

Design & Typesetting by
Linus Rowedda.

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Konos Press Ltd, Nicosia

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30TH ESU ANNIVERSARY

To many, the »big 30« is a particularly special birthday. For whatever reason, when turning 30 people tend to organise much bigger (or much smaller, depending on their mood) birthday parties. This often comes with assessing whether they have gotten where ever they thought they would be »when they grow up«—the answer usually being that they are somewhere else entirely. And that is not necessarily a bad thing, on the contrary! Their over-30 friends often encourage them by saying it is actually not a big deal and that the universe will still be the same tomorrow. At the same time, they are sometimes pressured by parents to do whatever parents did by the time they were 30. This often boils down to marriage and/or procreation.

But what happens when an organisation is turning 30? The grandeur of the birthday party is not a dilemma (as grand as possible), but what assessment is expected to be made? Where should an organisation be by the time it turns 30? How is this related to where it came from? And although the universe will also exist the day after the BIG 30, is it still the same universe that was there when the organisation was established?

Our beloved WESIB/ESIB/ESU (from here on labelled mostly as ESU) is turning 30 this October. This momentous occasion is of course a wonderful excuse to celebrate, but also an opportunity to reflect »where we are« and »where we could be« and to connect numerous generations of student activists that have made and will continue to make the essence of ESU.

As a contribution towards this celebrating, reflecting and connecting, three former chairpersons of the organisation (accidentally one well over 30, one exactly 30, and one under 30), with the help and support of a number of ESubians and many friends that ESU has made over the years, have prepared this anniversary publication.

The publication includes a series of articles focusing on some of the key aspects and moments in ESU's history. The first WESIB Director, Björn Sundström provides an insight into »how it all began«, followed by Stephen Grogan who sheds light on the turbulent times of late 80's and early 90's and about the first change of name (from WESIB to ESIB). Manja Klemenčič tells the "inside story" of how ESIB got in (and stayed in) the Bologna Process. Ligia Deca takes us out of Europe and presents how ESU went global, complemented by Johan Almqvist's discussion on ESU's excursions from the European down to the national and up to the global level, and the related challenges, rationales and solutions.

Alex Bols and George-Konstantinos Charonis, an authoring team spanning a decade of ESU's stronger than ever presence in European HE community, take a more internal look and reflect on equality in ESU, both celebrating the successes but more importantly reminding us that there is much more ground to cover and that we should not feel complacent. Jens Jungblut, through an interview style article tries to uncover the curious phenomenon of the »five witches from the East«, followed by Martina Vukasovic demystifying the so-called ESU mafia, stressing that while there might be life after active ESU duty, there is hardly a possibility of life without any connection to ESU.

How much ESU actually enriched and continues to enrich the lives of those fortunate enough to dedicate part of their youth (?) to student rights and higher education policies is also made visible by a collection of favourite memories from ESU and indications of »what would not have happened« if it was not for ESU and ESUBians.

Finally, a number of »external friends« of ESU provided their birthday wishes, as a testimony to the relevance and importance of both student participation in general and the work, expertise and dedication of ESU representatives over the years. While some of these birthday wishes made us blush with inner pride, we are very very grateful for these wishes and for having such great friends! Happy »big 30« ESU!

Vanja Ivosevic, Allan Päll and Martina Vukasovic

Almost half a century ago when as a young assistant I joined the academic community in Serbia I was greeted with the following declaration: »Welcome to the World of Academia! This is a wonderful world to live in; it would be absolutely perfect if there were no students in it«. It did not take me long to realise that, though this was a benign joke, it was not far off the mark from the prevailing attitude within the academic community. Travelling around European universities I also discovered that we could not claim sole ownership of this sentiment. It was used almost as an introductory theme, to establish common ground, a shortcut to collegial understanding, a way of brightening the atmosphere with hearty jokes on the students account.

Then, suddenly the tables were turned, and the students had the last laugh. Our dream world was brutally shuttered, as they threw down the gauntlet. Some strange youngsters calling themselves representatives of ESU popped up out of nowhere and told us bluntly »Look, like it or not but we ARE AROUND and intend to stay!«. We were confronted with strange questions concerning what we teach, why we do it, is higher education a public good, how we think we can provide them with better skills ... And they were not ready to accept just any answer, instead they were determined to become our partners. They insisted on telling us what to do, implying that we did not always know what is best for them. In a world where we professors were the bright stars around which the constellations moved they demanded to be put center-stage. As incredible as this seems they succeeded. Perhaps it is too early to claim that within these last twenty years European students gathered within ESU managed to change us completely, but there is no doubt that they seriously shook the very foundations of the European academic community. Judging by their achievements so far I do not have any doubts that they will continue to shape it to the benefit of all students and indeed of society as a whole. As a retired professor I can only wish them luck in this serious endeavour. Not to mention that I am relieved that I won't be in the position to greet some new colleagues explaining to them that this indeed was a wonderful world until ESU came around.

Dr. Srbijanka Turajlic, professor at the School of Electrical Engineering at University of Belgrade

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

*by Björn Sundström, first Director
of WESIB, 1982–86*

*»In the Beginning ... there was darkness ... and
God said, Let there be light ... and there was
light ...« (freely interpreted)*

Post-Second World War European politics greatly influenced the student movement. It was a time of the Cold War between East and West, between socialism and capitalism, between the one-party state and parliamentary democracy ... But even within professed democracies there was the struggle between Left and Right with their different views on higher education and its place in society. All this affected the development of student politics in the 50's, 60's and 70's.

There was also the largely left-wing student rebellion of the late 60's, where large number of students in many corners of the Western world protested against the authoritarian and rigid structures of universities and higher education, as well as the poor conditions for students. Massive demonstrations, sit-ins, occupations and non-parliamentary action shook the world of universities and other institutions of higher learning. At the

same time, there were authoritarian countries in the East that suppressed students from engaging in such political action, although students did play a large role in both the popular uprising in Hungary in 1956, and the Prague Spring of 1968.

Ever since the ending of the Second World War, international student meetings took place in an atmosphere created by the dominant role of the International Union of Students (IUS). The IUS was one of many so-called socialist front organisations, created to spread the gospel of socialism after the war. The IUS had its headquarters in Prague and received its main funding from the Soviet Union (i.e. the Kremlin). Almost every meeting of European students at the time was organised, financed, or otherwise dominated by the IUS.

International student meetings in the mid-70's were characterised by drawn-out sessions where hour-long speeches were read from papers that all participants already had, often interrupted for long applause, and often following the recital of political slogans.

Pre-prepared conclusions, ready before the meeting even started, were distributed late and accepted without amendments. Participants were encouraged to struggle against everyone

and everything, in particular international imperialism (i.e. The United States) and colonialism.

Many democratically elected student officers and politicians were getting tired of this mess and were looking for alternatives. In this quest, student activists from both the left and right, particularly in the West European countries, could find common ground, in that they considered the most important objective for student unions was to act as representatives for students with an aim to improve education and to improve students living conditions.

In **1976**, the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) had attempted a more democratic form of student meeting, by organising a seminar in Lund, Sweden, on the topic of **Internationalisation of higher education**. In connection with this

seminar, the issue of how to democratise the international student movement was raised among some West European unions.

The most important international meetings for National Unions of Students (NUS'es) at the time were the so-called European Meetings (EM). In frustration over the lack of development of the EM, a number of West European student unions, invited by the French student union UNEF-Renouveau, met in Paris in February, 1981.

The purpose was to discuss a proposal of creating an information bank, which would serve the unions with news in the higher education field. It would cover the topic of higher education in the framework of international bodies, as well as in the work of national and regional student organisations.

1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
European Meetings			Western European Student Information Bureau (WESIB)						European Student Information Bureau (ESIB)						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm1 • Stockholm, Sweden bm2 • London, UK bm3 • Paris, France bm4 • Zürich, Switzerland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm5 • London, UK bm6 • Strasbourg, France 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm7 • Dublin, Ireland bm8 • Msida, Malta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm9 • Vienna, Austria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm10 • London, UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm11 • Stockholm, Sweden bm12 • Dublin, Ireland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm13 • Oslo, Norway bm14 • Brussels, Belgium bm15 • Msida, Malta bm16 • Einsiedeln, Switzerland bm17 • Sheffield, UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm18 • Ljubljana & Zagreb bm19 • Brussels, Belgium bm20 • Vienna, Austria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm21 • Ciudad Real, Spain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm22 • Msida, Malta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm23 • Kijava, Finland bm24 • Heino, The Netherlands bm25 • Luxembourg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm26 • Warsaw, Poland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bm27 • Belfast, UK bm28 • Uppsala, Sweden bm29 • Ljubljana, Slovenia bm30 • Budapest, Hungary bm31 • Brussels, Belgium 	

ment of what was to be called an »Information Bureau«.

All recognised National Unions of Students in Western Europe would be invited and the meeting eventually took place on May 28, 1982. Participating in this meeting were representatives of DSF (Denmark), NSU (Norway), SYL (Finland), VDS (Germany), NUS (UK), UNEF (France), UNEF-ID (France), VSS/UNES (Switzerland), and ÖH (Austria). All of those invited were present with the exception of SHI (Iceland) and USI (Ireland), both absent due to financial restrictions. POFNE (Cyprus) were invited, but at that time was heavily involved in the IUS, and had declared they would not participate.

Almost all present unions were positive to the establishment of the Bureau, with the exception of VDS and UNEF. UNEF was negative, largely because the rivalling UNEF-ID had been invited to join, while the German VDS declared that they remained loyal to IUS. SYL, considering Finland's balancing political position between East and West, argued that they would have to take the matter back for their Board's consideration. However, there were enough unions in support to carry the idea further and NUSUK, NSU and SFS were charged with the production of a set of statutes for the intended organisation. The proposed statutes would be considered at a **meeting in Stockholm in October, 1982**. It was decided, in order to set the tone for future meetings, that this first meeting would be preceded by a seminar on a topic of interest to all unions. The topic chosen was »**Student participation in decision-making bodies in Higher Education**«. The meeting would also provide a forum to discuss the pros and cons of mandatory student union membership for all students in higher education. This format is still used today in ESU, with Board Meetings preceded by a seminar! It has certainly stood the test of time.



The summer of 1982 was an intense period in the history of WESIB, as a **statute drafting committee** worked back and forth on a draft proposal. The drafting committee consisted of Anders Ekeland, International Officer of NSU, Julian Eccles, NUS (UK) International Officer, and myself, Björn Sundström, in the capacity of International Officer of SFS. You have to bear in mind, that this was a huge task, as there were no computers, no mobile phones, no Internet at this time. The only form of direct communication was by office telephones, and all drafts—written on a typewriter—had to be mailed by post, which could take weeks going back and forth across Europe!

In September, 1982, the statutes were ready for discussion, and at the same time, the Ministry of Education in Sweden confirmed that it had grant-

ed sfs 400,000 Swedish crowns (appr. 37,000 Euro) in support of the start-up of WESIB. This secured the first years of existence of the Information Bureau.

On **Sunday, October 17, 1982**, ten national student organisations participated in the Constitutional Meeting of WESIB in Stockholm, Sweden. Eight of these found that they could accept the Statutes as proposed and amended in the final draft. Due to various national restrictions on accepting membership in international organisations, five unions could sign the original agreement document: SFS, NSU, SHI, NUSUK, and UNEF-ID. ÖH and DSF were given additional time to confirm membership, and consequently, later that autumn did join. This way, **WESIB had seven founding members**, with VSS/UNES joining as the eighth full member in May, 1983.

The Constitutional meeting decided to place the headquarters in Stockholm, initially for the first two-year period. The author of this article was appointed Acting Director, later to be confirmed as full Director, with a first mandate period until December, 1984. I was eventually re-appointed for a second term lasting until early 1986.

The first six months were spent establishing the WESIB office and to introduce the Bureau to international organisations in the field of higher education. WESIB was presented to OECD in Paris, the European Community in Brussels, and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. European bodies, tired of dealing with the IUS, were delighted with the news of the Bureau. Contacts were also initiated with the European Youth Foundation and the European Youth Centre, the European Community Youth Forum, the European Co-ordination Bureau and CENYC in Brussels, and several other youth-related organisations.

ESU is the voice of European students, and it is a voice that carries throughout the European Higher Education Area. Students are learners as well as social actors. If learning was ever a passive endeavor, the age of passive learning and learners are luckily long since gone. But being an active learner within one's academic discipline is not enough: students are also citizens and, as European ministers have said so clearly, members of the academic community. Being citizens and members of a community implies looking beyond the boundaries of one's institution and country. Students as members of our community—and not as clients—have a stake in the development in European higher education as well as in the development of Europe tout court. Those of us who are no longer students should be happy that they do and that students have ESU to represent them because without ESU's active contribution—often critical, almost always constructive—we would have a less interesting and challenging European Higher Education Area.

Over the next 30 years, I hope ESU will represent European students as well as you have done during the first 30 years. Happy birthday.

Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department, Council of Europe

Although the stated purpose of WESIB was not to compete with the IUS, a new chapter in the history of co-operation between NUSes was beginning. The expansion of WESIB into ESIB, following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the democratisation of Eastern Europe, was obviously always something to hope for, but at the time difficult to truly believe in.

The first edition of the WESIB newsletter was published in the spring of 1983. It was obviously written on an electrical typewriter, and was a photo-copied product with information on developments in higher education and student union news. The first edition was 1,000 copies and

member organisations could re-distribute or copy the newsletter for further distribution to local or regional student organisations in their own country.

WESIB also distributed information from the international organisations in the field of higher education, hints and tips of upcoming conferences and seminars, and publications from other sources to member organisations.

In the spring of 1983, the WESIB board met twice in London (February) and in Paris (May). In Paris, WESIB organised, in co-operation with UNEF-ID, a seminar on »Study financing«. This was particularly interesting, as many of the unions and organisations outside WESIB requested the materials and conclusions of the seminar. A public statement on study financing, which was highly publicised,

was the result of the seminar and participants agreed to collect background information to be included in a handbook to be used by union officials.

In the **autumn of 1983**, the WESIB Board met in Zürich, Switzerland, and the seminar in connection with the BM was »**Crisis in higher education**«, which involved crises in finance, management, student influence, political decision-making, ac-

cess, gender issues, and social class representation in higher education.

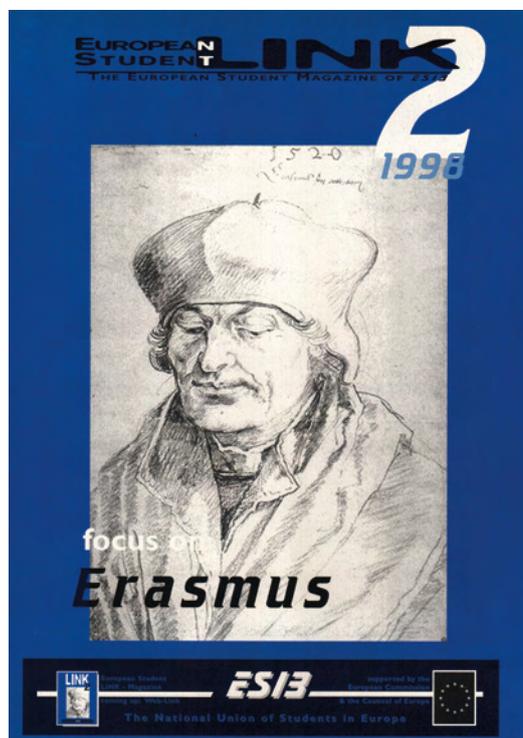
The »Crisis in higher education« seminar resulted in a **Joint Day of Action** organised by SFS, SHI, USI, NUSUK, and VSS/UNES on **Feb. 23, 1984** aimed at financial cutbacks in higher education in these countries. WESIB provided various forms of support for this action and the day was widely covered in the press of many countries. In a dramatic follow-up, shortly after the Joint Day of Action, USI (Ireland) representatives were released from jail after having been imprisoned for their protests against government withdrawal of the so-called medical cards of Irish students.

The seminar in Zurich provided us with large amounts of information on cutbacks in higher education, particularly in the UK where whole universities had been cancelled, while schools in Austria and Switzerland had relatively limited such cutbacks. These two countries at this time had universities more or less without quotas (numerus clausus).

By early 1984, it was announced that the Director would visit Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Malta, in an effort to expand WESIB into southern Europe.

The **May Board Meeting 1984** was held in **London** with a seminar theme of »**Student union organisation**«. The conditions for this meeting were great and the democratic atmosphere of the discussions was excellent, thus further strengthening WESIB. It was decided to organise a seminar within the European Youth Centre on the theme of »**Foreign students in Western Europe**«. It would entirely take place in the Centre and would include the Board Meeting (**October 1984**).

In the European Youth Centre, the meeting was in the form of a six-day study session and had both conference facilities and accommodation for participants in the centre. It produced a **summa-**



ry of national reports, a joint statement on student mobility, and comments on the Ministers' Recommendation on foreign students in the European Community.

In 1984 DSF (Denmark) left WESIB. It had been evident for some time that DSF could not agree politically with other NUSes with regard to some WESIB actions. On a positive note, USI (Ireland), LSVB (The Netherlands), and KSU (Malta) decided to join WESIB, which now had reached 10 member unions.

The rise of WESIB was beginning to influence student politics in general. The Austrians managed to pull off a successful PrepCom meeting, ensuring that the European Meeting could be held despite previous political turmoil and a strained relationship between the IUS on the one hand and the WESIB unions on the other. It was somewhat of a sensation when UNEF-ID (a WESIB member) was put in charge of preparations and hosting the EM in Les Arcs, France.

1985 was another exciting year in the history of WESIB. The Swedish government had agreed to extend its financing of the organisation for another year. In addition to the continued flow of information through newsletters and other channels, the friends from USI (Ireland) agreed to co-host a WESIB seminar on »Graduate unemployment« in **Dublin**, as usual in connection with the Board meeting.

The seminar discussed the employment situation for graduates, government action affecting graduate employment, numerus clausus, career guidance and instruments affecting outflow of graduates, as well as various actions taken by the student organisations in the struggle against graduate unemployment.

KSU (Malta) agreed to host the **1985 autumn Board meeting** and the seminar called »The role

of inter-governmental bodies in higher education«. It was held in Valletta and was covered extensively in the Maltese news media. Once again, Ministers of education and culture expressed their firm support for a democratic student movement.

At the end of 1985, the Swedish funds in support of WESIB were running out, and due to severe

cutbacks in all government funding, it was unlikely to be renewed, regardless of the fact that the Swedish government recognised that WESIB had done great things in a very short period of time.

In order to secure a future for the Bureau, NUS (UK) generously offered to host the office of WESIB and eventually, in 1986 it moved to the British capital.

It can and should be said that WESIB by its very existence drastically changed the game rules in European student co-operation and influenced all other forms of co-operation between students in Europe. Although the foundation of WESIB, later to become ESIB and eventually ESU, was initially intended to simply create a meeting place for democratic and representative student unions in Europe, the dream of also creating a trade union-type representation for all European university students was always in the backs of our minds. The foundation was laid by a small group of dedicated individuals and their persist-

MANIFESTO on Student Visions for Higher Education in Europe

In accordance with the goal of fostering higher education in Europe and taking an active role in shaping the European Higher Education policies ESIB - The National Unions of Students in Europe representing over 8 million students in 41 member National Unions of Students in 32 countries voices its main visions as adopted in the form of policy papers on following issues

- Student Rights - Human Rights
- Student participation at the European level
- Education
- Future of Higher Education
- Access to Qualified Higher Education
- Recognition of Qualifications
- Quality Assurance and Accreditation
- Educating for Information Society
- Student Welfare
- Student Mobility
- Vertical Mobility



Manifesto is handed to representatives of the French Presidency to the European Union at the First European Student Convention in Paris on October 29, 2000.

ence and love for democracy made the idea grow and flourish.

It was of course impossible at the time to envision the remarkable growth that this movement later would enjoy, thus indirectly affecting

Juuso Leivonen (Commission for Internal Audit)

@juusoleivonen

By 2020 ESU based in Brussels with a strong team of dedicated people. All NUSes are strong both ideologically and financially, and committed to ESU and its work. #ESU30years

millions of students. But I would ask all student activists involved in ESU work not to forget the past, not to forget what a few individuals created without the electronic and digital comforts of today. It did not happen because of digital gadgets or the Internet, but it happened because of true dedication to the cause: To better the conditions of student life in general. When you enjoy your own dedicated work in ESU, please send a thought to the pioneers of yesterday, for they deserve recognition.

This author is grateful to all throughout the history of WESIB/ESIB/ESU who have made it possible for ESU to grow to new heights. When we were in late-night sessions in the Stockholm meeting, or when we celebrated the foundation of WESIB with champagne in the gardens of Drottningholm Castle just outside the City, it would have been incredible to know that we would celebrate 30 years of existence and continual growth in 2012!

It all started as an idea of a few, began its work in a small private kitchen in southern Stockholm, and now represents organisations with more than 11 million members. I urge everyone involved to consider your own responsibility every time that discussions are tough and (political or other) emotions run high. Whatever you do or decide, you must remain dedicated to the idea ... **Students need good, decent and honest representation and education is a right, not a privilege.** ●●

ESIB

by Stephen Grogan, Director of ESIB, 1994–96

I first heard about the West European Student Information Bureau—WESIB, through my local student union, in Ireland around 1986. In the summer of 1987, I was elected to one of the full time positions within USI and for the next three years represented them at most European and/or International student meetings. My first WESIB seminar was in Oslo in 1987.

At that time WESIB was still a relatively young organisation, having been created in the early 1980's and still growing, in terms of members from across Western Europe.

Because of the context in which WESIB was created, it had a constitution which required all decisions to be made by consensus (defined as being the absence of an active objection) and reflected the ethos of its founders—who did not want it to be a representative body or one which would adopt policy positions.

Each gathering followed a similar format—of academic style seminars followed by the board meeting which mostly confined itself to deciding which events the single staff member (the director) or the chairperson would attend, who would

host the next meeting and deciding upon the criteria for membership.

My first board meeting went on for hours, I remember we finished around 4am and then restarted a few hours later, before it all had to end as people escaped to the airport. The consensus method of making decisions took an enormous amount of time and was vulnerable to the usual misunderstandings arising from language and culture as well as to the intransience of organisations or issues.

From 1987 onwards there was a continual strain between those national unions who wanted to begin examining what the EEC was doing in higher education and working to develop a voice to represent student interests toward this European institution.

On the other side were those national unions who didn't see the importance of the EEC to their national priorities and who wanted to avoid being drawn into a »political« arena where National student policies might be contradicted by Europe-





an student policies or where some of the student political dramas of the 1960's and 1970's with the IUS would re-emerge.

Unfortunately for WESIB at this time, the organisation was caught in the middle of these competing ideas. It had over its few years of existence become an effective academic ethos-based organisation—bringing people together to share information and experiences, but was not able to take things any further.

As the historic events of 1989 unfolded, the dynamic within WESIB was also naturally affected. The first of these changes was the change of name, as WESIB became the European Student Information Bureau (ESIB) and the second was to begin relations with the new national student bodies that were emerging and transforming throughout Central and Eastern Europe and to determine their membership requests.

However this was no easy process as the constitution and decision making processes of ESIB was still in essence that of WESIB and dominated nearly all the board meetings in and around that time.

As the new members were accepted, the organisation began to turn its focus towards the outside world and not just its own internal procedures and functioning. New methods of making decisions were introduced, the constitution was re-structured and a willingness to increase co-operation improved. Once again the organisation was renamed: this time to ESIB—The National Unions of Students in Europe, to reflect these changes.

One of the driving forces for this change was dramatically increased membership from all over Europe and a growing realisation of the importance of the European Union in shaping and influ-

encing all aspects of life, including higher education.

It was at this time that I was employed as the ESIB Director (1994–96) Until then the organisation had viewed itself primarily as a student umbrella organisation—and while we co-operated and were actively involved in organisations like the EC Youth Forum, ECB (the European Co-ordinating body for INGYO's) and CENYC (Council of Europe National Youth Councils) we were organisationally much smaller and less well resourced than our counterparts in other sections of the youth movement.

At this stage, the organisation moved to build up the capacity of the head office in Vienna, to learn more about how the other INGYO's funded and organised themselves, to actively seek out new additional funding across a wider range of policy issues than just higher education—and most importantly to involve more members in the work of ESIB between the twice yearly seminar/board meetings.

Over a short period ESIB was successful in attracting funding and increasing the office based staff—with the introduction of an Information/Publications officer (Yvonne Woods) and an occasional Project officer (Alexandra Strickner) A professional looking ESIB handbook was prepared and instead of producing a newsletter for 30 or 40 people in the international office of NUSes, we started to produce a magazine posted directly to the member unions of our NUS members—I think we had a mailing list of just over 1,000 local student unions, with a wider range of content than just ESIB internal goings on—I can remember one very good edition highlighting the war in Bosnia. All of these developments helped make the ESIB office into a more active and effective centre.

When ESIB changed its name to ESU, this change was overdue. ESIB had long ceased to be a mere provider of information; ESIB members were student representatives who in a professional way raised their constituency's concerns at a European level. They have unvaryingly and with the same commitment done so to the present day. Here is unwavering admiration for the way ESU has, over the years, managed to make the best of the European student voice emerge. It is a voice that is both heard and listened to. The introduction of the social dimension into the Bologna Process is ESIB/ESU's merit and the students' impatience to see this agenda carried forward has given the process its legitimacy. This is a rare achievement. Congratulations on turning thirty! In 1968 we said: don't trust anybody over thirty. I trust that as far as ESU is concerned this adage no longer holds true.

Germain Dondelinger, Premier Conseiller de Gouvernement, Luxembourg, BFUG member since its inception

The most regrettable failure was that the organisation grew too fast during this period and became overwhelmed by the lack of a proper system of administration, personal failings on my part and over work being among the main weaknesses.

I mentioned earlier that ESIB was much smaller and financially weak as an organisation than its counterparts in the wider European youth movement. Until the end of the 1980's/beginning of the 1990's there wasn't any other organisation presenting itself as a European student body. But this was changing in the mid 1990's with other »student voices« emerging—the main organisation being something called AIESEC. It was still small and present in a few countries, but they had been successful in accessing funding from the EU and had been mentioned by certain sections of the European Commission.

I came into contact to ESIB in the nineties but I was rather unaware of its full potential until the first Bologna meeting in June 1999. My personal experiences with student activism and activists on the European level (from the 1970s) woke up immediately when we noticed a group of energetic students from various countries requiring access to the conference attended so far by ministers, rectors and higher education experts only. Of course that ESIB people were invited to enter (however, there were also some hesitation in the hall) and they immediately took a constructive but critical and sometimes also radical approach to debates on the emerging European Higher Education Area. In the course of the next years, ESIB changed its formal identity and renamed to ESU but the essence has remained the same. Beyond 2010, we are aware of deficiencies and problems related to the idea of the European Higher Education Area and its implementation; these deficiencies and problems would be much bigger, even unbearable if there was no ESIB and no ESU on the Bologna boat. Go ahead! And best wishes for the next 30 years!

Pavel Zgaga, Bologna Process Rapporteur 2001–03, former State Secretary and Minister for Higher Education in Slovenia

From my perspective the main challenge was to secure ESIB's position as the primary representative Student organisation in Europe, with both our contemporaries in the European youth movement and with the European institutions—the EU in particular. The emergence of other types of »student groupings« was both a threat to ESIB with its Independent, Democratic and Representative character and to its member organisations and their ethos (especially those based on auto-

matic membership in Northern and Western Europe).

Building up the ESIB office also played its role in gaining a higher profile with the EU (especially with the Education and Social Directorates General) and with the European Parliament, visits to which were popular with individual national unions and very effective in making sure ESIB was known to other partners, decision makers and founders.

As I mentioned earlier, the European student movement had a different set of priorities before 1989. But there has always been a common trend which would have been the desire to meet and engage in a political dialogue.

Post 1989 for ESIB the main priorities were:

To reform and re-structure the ESIB constitution, displaying the willingness to increase co-operation and co-ordination by the member organisations and their recognition of the importance of the European Institutions to their own core work and principles.

To build up the capacity of ESIB to be recognised and given an opportunity to influence higher education, youth and social policies being assembled by the European Union.

It is great to see that with the establishment of the European Students' Union all these processes have germinated and come to fruition. An independent, democratic and representative student movement is a defining characteristic of European students and something to be rightfully proud about. Congratulations to ESU on its anniversary. ●●

HOW ESIB GOT INTO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

*by Dr. Manja Klemenčič, Secretary
General of ESIB, 1999–2001*

It was February 1999, when the 1999 ESIB Executive Committee (EC) and the new Director went on their first lobby week to Brussels. One theme dominated their discussions with the representatives from the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), the European Parliament (EP) and the partner organisations: the European higher education (HE) policy agenda that had launched a major new initiative aiming to »harmonise the architecture of the European system of HE«. The initiative had started with the Sorbonne Declaration and was to be further elaborated at a high-level conference in Bologna in June 1999. The news was very much in accordance with the report to ESIB BM35 from the meeting of the Directors General of HE and the heads of Rectors' Conferences in October 1998 in Vienna. ESIB 1998 EC—according to 1998 ESIB EC member Judith Sargentini's speech to that meeting—saw a link between harmonisation of structures and better recognition of qualifications (a key topic of the BM35 in Austria), cautioned against possible harmonisation of contents, and advocated the inclusion of non-EU

countries in the process and for the active involvement of students in the discussions leading to Bologna.

In the first months of 1999, ESIB EC decided on the political aim of getting an invitation to the Bologna conference and to impress upon national student unions the importance of being involved in the national discussions. EC member, Remi Bourdu from UNEF-ID, was made responsible for this initiative as the French government was particularly involved in the process. In addition, he had excellent contacts to UDU Italy which was at the time approaching ESIB for membership. It was through particularly effective lobbying from UDU's representatives and Remi Bourdu that an official invitation to participate in the high-level conference to discuss »The European space for Higher Education« signed by the Rector of Bologna University was faxed to the ESIB Secretariat just a month before the event. There were seven delegates from ESIB. Fortunately, UDU secured additional 16 »seats« and participation from several NUSes was enabled on UDU's ticket, and few NUSes participated as part of national delegations. Hence, in the end there were about 20 student representatives present at the conference.

AT THE BOLOGNA SUMMIT »THE EUROPEAN SPACE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION«

Before the official opening of the event, the student delegation assembled in the lobby of the beautiful Foresteria San Giovanni in Monte, Università di Bologna, where ESIB participants were staying. While sitting on the stone floors in the lobby, a strategy was prepared for the meeting: how to divide up into the five thematic group sessions and which ESIB policies will be highlighted, whom to lobby for ESIB's participation in the initiative, how to respond to the Bologna Declaration (of which a draft was already obtained) and the

*Brikena Xhomaqi (Human Rights and Solidarity Coordinator) @BrikenaXhomaqi
No Education No Future! No Student Movement
No Democracy! ESU fighting for democracy is
how I see the road ahead ESU #ESU30years*

contents of the »alterna- tive« Bologna Declaration, how to approach the media and get into the press conference, etc. The common ground in these

discussions was that of dismay over not being formally involved in the drafting of the Declaration, but also of agreement that the initiative is not bad for students and that the intensification of cooperation between European governments in the area of HE is indeed an important step towards building a common Europe. The approach agreed upon in these discussions was a critical but constructive input to the conference.

Two major achievements were celebrated at the event itself. First, the Bologna Students' Declaration was prepared at the meeting, commenting on the principles and objectives of the Bologna Declaration. In two pages, ESIB welcomed the intensification of cooperation between European governments in the field of HE and conveyed ESIB's principles regarding HE in Europe: that »the

best way to improve the attractiveness and the quality of European HE would be to increase public funding«, that ESIB is committed to »a model of quality education open to the largest number of students« and that the initiative »must not be a means to install any kind of limitations of the access to HE«. It argued that »diversity of HE systems in Europe was not a cause of their ›lack of attractiveness««. The final message in the Declaration was that of student involvement in the initiative:

»Finally, we would like to state that we deeply regret that the students were not involved in the drafting of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations and in the definition of their objectives even though 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, NUSes will be consulted at the national level and that ESIB will be consulted at the European level.«

The Student Declaration was immediately signed by 19 NUSes (out of 37 from 31 countries at the time) who were either present or whose consent could be obtained via email and telephone in a very short time. During the event, ESIB representatives handed it out to the conference participants. Formally it was adopted by the ESIB Board at the Board Meeting (BM) 37 in Cyprus.

Second, fairly unexpected and due to a significant lobby at the event itself, the organisers decided to ad hoc change the program of the meeting to include a plenary address by ESIB Chairperson, Antti Pentikainen. Listening to Antti's most eloquent speech in the plenary, it seemed that ESIB's involvement in the follow up to the Bologna Declaration had been secured. Yet, it took another two years until ESIB was recognised as the

only organisation representing student interest in—what became known as—the BP, and another four years before ESIB obtained a consultative status in the political structures of the Process. The delay was indeed related to the newness of the developing policy process and polity of follow-up to the Bologna Declaration. There were, however, also complications caused by lack of full recognition of ESIB by the European Community institutions reflected especially in the abstruse relationship between ESIB and CEC.

THE STUDENT PLATFORM AND ESIB'S ABSTRUSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

At the end of the 1990s, from among the European Community institutions, ESIB clearly had the closest ties to CEC. The contacts to the EP were sporadic and to the Council of Ministers basically non-existent. CEC regarded ESIB as one of the key associations in the field of education and often invited it for different consultations. There were frequent meetings between the Higher Education Unit of DG EAC and ESIB, and several of ESIB's projects were funded by CEC. The view of ESIB at the time was, however, that these contacts and activities did not meet the expectations of ESIB in terms of influencing European HE policies and debates. It was also clear that CEC did not recognise ESIB as a legitimate representative of students in Europe; at least not in the same way as national student unions in most European countries are recognised by the national authorities and involved in the national HE policy processes. This situation was also visibly different from the relationship between DG EAC and European Youth Forum (EYF) in the area of youth policies in which CEC was applying a much

more corporatist approach, granting EYF effective monopoly of representation.

In contrast, CEC's approach towards student associations on HE policies was clearly pluralist. It had insisted on consulting all three interdisciplinary student associations—ESIB, Association des Etats Generaux des Etudiants d'Europe (AEGEE) and Erasmus Students Network (ESN), as well as the European Youth Forum (EYF) of which all other three are members, and which had in 1989 set up a student intermediation structure—the »Student Forum«—»solicited« by CEC to have an interlocutor from the students' side. The »Student Forum« comprised NUSes as well as of various international non-governmental youth organisations from EYF. It was organisationally and politically affiliated with and dependent on EYF. While it did provide the European institutions with their opinions and suggestions concerning few initiatives, such as the Memorandum on HE and the Erasmus Program, its functioning was hampered due to the dependence on EYF and the divergences of interests between youth and student organisations. By 1999, the Student Forum was practically inactive, albeit EYF continued to show interest in monopolising the area of education and HE policies in the same way as was the case—and legitimately so—with CEC youth policies. ESIB's impression at the time was that both ESN and AEGEE, although not representative of student interests to the same extent as ESIB, had been given the same access to policy making as ESIB.

This situation was profoundly dissatisfactory for ESIB, and this dissatisfaction grew along with ESIB's gradual, but certain internal capacity-building through expanding membership and deepening of policies. ESIB held discussions with CEC since 1998 concerning the involvement of national unions of students in European HE policy making. In

these discussions, ESIB was at some point promised by the Commission that a student platform composed of NUSes would be formed to serve as an interlocutor of student interests to CEC for all issues related to HE. However, this promise was not kept. Instead, in 2000, the Commission suggested that their key partner student associations—ESIB, ESN and AEGEE—come together as the »European Liaison Group of Higher Education Student Organisations«. In the initial discussions, the Commission suggested inviting also EYF, but retracted on this point due to the strong opposition of ESIB in particular. In the Agreement signed in February 2001, the three organisations agreed that the Group had been established in order to strengthen the exchange of information between student organisations and the European Commission and foster cooperation on joint issues. It was clearly stated in the Agreement that »the Liaison Group will not be considered as an organisation but as an informal group«. It was understood by the three organisations that the character of the Liaison Group was consultative, not representative; it was structured as an informal group and its domain of work was in relation to CEC exclusively. The Commission, however, believed at the time in the possibility that the Group would extend to other organisations in the future, representing the »voice of students associations« at European level. CEC recognised that ESIB was the most representative student association and informally invited it to have a coordinating role in the Liaison Group. Yet, at the same time it wished to keep others also involved. The timing of the creation of the Liaison Group was not accidental. The change in relations between DG EAC and student (and other educational) associations first and foremost reflected the ongoing preparation of the White Paper on European Governance, a major Commission

initiative tackling growing perceptions of democratic deficit in EU decision-making. The Liaison Group was just one of the initiatives that started in this changing political context. One of the key proposals was precisely improving openness and stakeholder involvement in EU policy processes. Indeed, ESIB was riding on the tide of the increasingly conducive conditions for student involvement. And it could fill the role because it was strengthening also internally. But the initially favourable developments had an unexpected turn.

The problem occurred when the Commission called for the involvement of the Liaison Group in the BP and presented the Liaison Group to the national governments as the representative platform of students in Europe—the Student Platform—which it was clearly not. Following the Bologna Summit, in the Tampere Ministerial Meeting in 1999, the Ministers agreed on a general structure for the BP: the enlarged and the steering follow-up groups. ESIB's participation was not foreseen in either of the groups at the time, even though they included representatives of HEIS (CRE and Confederation). In June 2000, in Portugal, an observatory status to the Enlarged Follow-Up Group of the Bologna Declaration was granted to Council of Europe, Eurashe and the Student Platform. From the informal report that ESIB could obtain from the meeting (yes, gossip, but triangulated through different sources that were present at the meeting), it was the Commission that advocated for the inclusion of the Student Platform rather than ESIB individually.

In December 2000, ESIB prepared an official letter—which was indeed solicited by the Follow-Up Group—requesting participation in the Follow-Up Group. In the letter, ESIB highlighted that »(t)he character of the Liaison group (was) consultative, not representative. It (was) structured

as an informal group and its domain of work (was) the relation to the European Commission exclusively.« Furthermore, ESIB stated unambiguously that »(t)he Liaison group has not worked on the issues of Bologna Declaration and has certainly not been established for the purpose of follow up of the Bologna Declaration«. Despite the earlier decision to include the Student Platform, ESIB has by then been the only student organisation invited to the Follow-up Group meetings and relevant Bologna/Prague events organised on the European and national level. By the Prague Summit, the idea of the Student Platform faded from the official documents and ESIB was formally acknowledged as the only student association involved in the process, the role that it in effect had assumed already from the beginning.

About the same time as ESIB was—confidentially—requesting official participation in the follow-up process, another—the final and perhaps by far the lowest—point in the relations between ESIB and CEC took place. On December 20, 2000 ESIB received a letter from the Higher Education Unit reacting on the ESIB »Manifesto on Student Visions for Higher Education in Europe« from the first Student Convention in Paris (29 October 2000). The letter expressed that DG EAC was »severely worried by both the tone and the content of the document, notably the chapter ›Student participation at the European level«. Furthermore, the letter stated that »(s)entences like ›The functioning of EU institutions is marked by total lack of transparency‹ and ›Students are excluded from any participation in the decision-making processes‹ were neither acceptable nor fair«. The letter went on explaining the various initiatives and projects that proved the contrary.

The response, prepared by ESIB Chairperson Remi Bourdu, reiterated powerfully that in Euro-

One of the very first meetings I attended when I joined EUA at the beginning in 2001 was an ESIB meeting held in the far north of Sweden (Skelleftea) to discuss the GATS, which was one of the first topics on which we worked together, and at that time the newly developing Bologna process and how to increase student involvement. From then on I have greatly valued my close cooperation with ESIB/ESU Presidents and Board members over the years, both on a personal and professional level. The growing involvement of students in higher education policy making at European level has been important for European higher education, and for EUA, by putting the spotlight increasingly on the needs of students. It has hopefully also served to increase awareness at national level of the importance of this change in perspective, and thus of a strong student voice. I never cease to be impressed by the contribution of ESU leadership, on a range of important topics, and by the high quality and vision of all those with whom I have worked over the years. I have learned a lot from these discussions, and look forward to continuing a strong partnership with ESU in future. European higher education needs a strong ESU also for the next 30 years.

Lesley Wilson, Secretary General of the European University Association (EUA)

pean democratic countries, NUSes are systematically consulted, informed and associated in the HE policy making; but that this was not the case on the European level. The Liaison Group indeed improved information exchange, but not the student impact on actual discussions and policy decisions. The letter also stated that the Commission violated the Agreement made by the Liaison Group when presenting the Group as an organisation or platform to the BP. Indeed, it took a lot of energy from ESIB representatives to explain to the national governments the actual character of the Liaison Group and the independence of the three associations. Finally, the letter also mentioned the

improved relationship of ESIB to the three EU Presidencies: the French, Swedish and Belgian. Due to the considerable effort of the new ESIB EC working together with NUSes to lobby the troika and other national governments, for the first time ESIB had developed firm ties to the EU Council of Ministers, and further strengthened the contacts to the EP.

In early 2001, the Commission quietly dropped the idea of the Student Platform and began to accept ESIB as the legitimate representative of students in Europe. During the same time, the first meetings were organised between the Commission and the key associations active in the field of higher education which included EUA, Eurashe, OBESSU and ESIB. The discussions revolved around how to improve these associations' involvement in the policy-making, and a possible special—and sufficiently secure and substantial—administrative funding line for these associations. (Two years later, these discussions culminated in a call for proposals which still to date provides administrative funding to ESIB).

The strongest evidence of the newly enhanced relationship between ESIB and CEC was the letter from Commissioner Reding on 10 April 2001. The letter was a response to an earlier ESIB's letter condemning an initiative EU Student Vote which aimed at establishing a »European Students Council« to represent students vis-a-vis the European institutions based on electronic student elections—e-voting. This was an initiative that had preoccupied ESIB for much of 2000 and early 2001. Commissioner Reding's response was unequivocal in stating that DG EAC would neither endorse nor financially support the initiative. The Commissioner stated that »in assessing the EUsv project proposal, one of the main arguments considered by the Commission was the position of the recognised student representative bodies with whom

we and our partner Ministries of Education work on regular basis«. In addition, the Commissioner invited ESIB representatives to a high-level meeting with Director of Education, Mr Coyne.

The letter and the meeting that followed created a new *modus vivendi* between ESIB and CEC that clearly indicated the Commissions' recognition of ESIB as the legitimate representative of students in Europe and also set the tone for much stronger involvement. Again, the Commission's internal political climate was clearly an enabling condition for such development. Equally important was external recognition by the EP and the Council of Ministers and other international organisations. The Council of Europe's, and especially Sjur Bergan's—its chief representatives on HE issues—continuous endorsement of ESIB's role as the single voice of European students and their granting ESIB a permanent observer status in its own governing structures, the Higher Education and Research Committee (CC-HER), was crucial. In fact in fighting the EU Student Vote initiative, ESIB obtained letters of support to act as representative of students on European level from the Council of Europe, UNESCO-CEPES, Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences, CRE and of course NUSes. Finally, ESIB could perhaps not fully take the advantage of the favourable climate for its enhanced recognition and role, had it not at the same time been in a process of rapid internal capacity building and organisational adaptation.

ESIB'S ORGANISATIONAL ADAPTATION

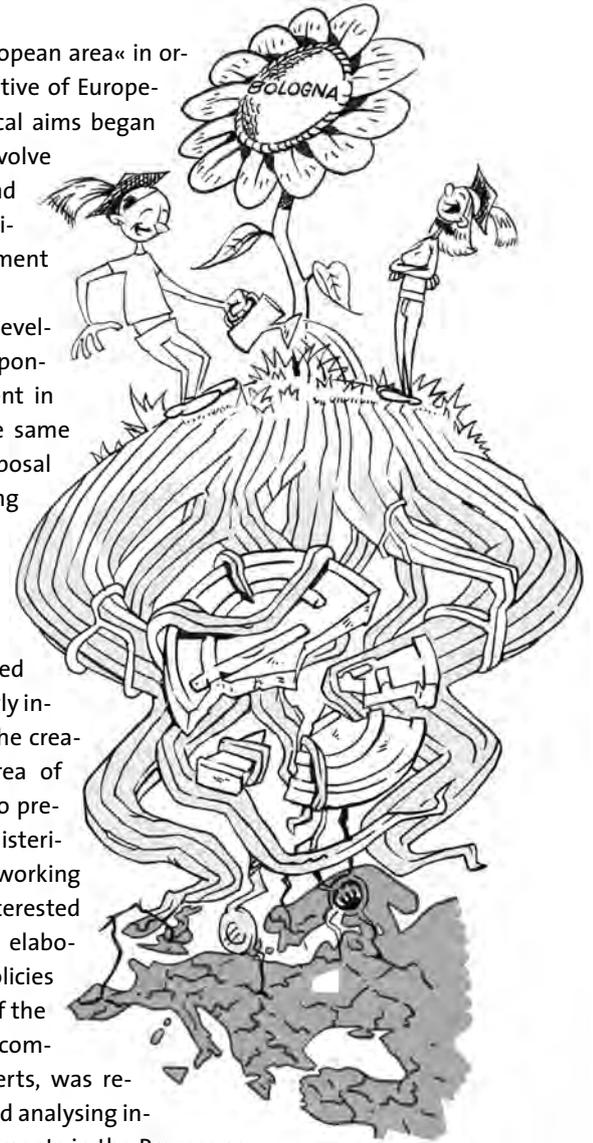
The BM37 in October 1999 in Nicosia, Cyprus was in many ways a historical BM in terms of ESIB's organisational development towards more external recognition and involvement in the BP. The decision was made to move the ESIB Secretariat from

Vienna to Brussels »(t)o be able to represent the students' view it is needed to be at the right place at the right time. In other words; where the decisions are made and the discussions are going on« (BM37 ESIB Plan of Work for 2000). Visibility was a major concern and was deeply intertwined with the ambition to raise the recognition and thus role in and influence on European-level HE policy making: »ESIB needs to be visible and known towards European organisations and institutions as relevant, competent, active, as being the legitimate representative organisation of all European students (...) Through promotional campaigns of ESIB as an organisations, its projects and activities as well as those of its members, the visibility of ESIB shall be improved.« Discussions of a possible name change were pending, but still unresolved at the time. Several important decisions were made, however, regarding improving information and communication channels through an internal monthly newsletter, new website, and mailing lists for ESIB structures and for external partners. These decisions might indeed seem obvious today, but in those days BM mailings were still sent by snail mail; and skype, facebook, twitter and dropbox were not yet invented.

In terms of political goals for 2000, the on-going concern had been to improve the formal and informal mechanisms of student involvement in European policy making. The Plan of Work for 2000 gave the EC the mandate to pursue the formation of the Liaison Group discussed above as well as to continue exploring the options of establishing an independent and official student platform composed of NUSes and act as a voice of students vis-à-vis the European institutions. High on the agenda was also capacity building of national and local unions, and especially to »strengthen the involvement of the student unions of the

Southern and Eastern European area« in order to be fully representative of European students. These political aims began slowly but surely to revolve around the emerging and soon predominant political agenda of the involvement in the BP.

The key decisions for developing new structures responsible for ESIB's involvement in the BP were taken at the same BM in Cyprus. At the proposal of the Education Working Group, an Ad Hoc Working Group on Prague 2001 and an Ad Hoc Expert Committee on Prague 2001 (CoP2001) were formed with the aim »to be strongly involved in the process of the creation of the European Area of Higher Education« and »to prepare for the Prague Ministerial Summit in 2001«. The working group, consisting of interested member unions, was to elaborate and develop ESIB policies related to the follow-up of the Bologna Declaration. CoP, comprising five selected experts, was responsible for collecting and analysing information on the developments in the Process as well as on the situation in the individual countries from the NUSes. SVL Finland took over the chairing of the Ad Hoc Working Group at this critical time, and the Committee became widely recognised through the work of its competent and energetic members: Axel Aerden (vvs Belgium), Far-



id Tabarki (Lsvb Netherlands), Ida Mielityinen (SVL Finland), and—appointed in 2000—Jacob Henricson (SFS Sweden) and Lukas Vylupek (SK RVŠ Czech Republic).

The work of the Prague 2001 Committee and the Ad Hoc Working Group was impressive. CoP2001 distributed questionnaires among NUSes with the aim of not only collecting the information, but also ensuring that student representatives at national and local level were paying attention to the developments and taking an active part in them. The ESIB Board adopted the plan of work of the CoP2001 (and later after BM40 BP Committee) granting it an effective mandate to approach NUSes to actively seek information within their respective countries on reforms undertaken in view of the BP, and also—at the same time—introduce ESIB to their governments and lobby for its formal involvement in the BP as the representative voice of students. This was, as Axel Aerden wrote in ESIB BPC Newsletter in August 2001, a major change in the relation between ESIB and NUSes: »Most of (NUSes) had never presented ESIB in that way in their own country«. Committee members along with the EC represented ESIB at Bologna/Prague related events.

CoP 2001 prepared a *Monthly Prague 2001 Newsletter*, which was initially intended to inform NUSes about the developments in the BP, but soon became solicited also from other members of the Enlarged Follow-Up Group and widely read as the primary source of updated information on the BP. The ESIB webpage on Bologna developed by the Committee on Prague 2001 served for a significant period of time as the key source of background information on the Bologna/Prague Process. The impact of both sources was immense for two reasons. First, the information provided was a straightforward and quality description of key

concepts and issues in the BP. Second, there was a shortage of such information within the Process in the absence of a »central« BP website. In addition, the EUA—which could potentially provide such information—was in the process of radical organisational reforms (merging two organisations—CRE and Confederation of EU Rectors Conferences—into one) and at the time not able to play such role. So the information that was initially intended for NUSes became increasingly used by other participants in the BP.

All these activities together contributed enormously to the external recognition of ESIB; but they also got NUSes more involved in ESIB. A major achievement, as discussed above, was to get ESIB—in fact the Student Platform—invited to the meetings of the Enlarged Follow-Up group together with government representatives and representatives of HEIs and Council of Europe. Another was the support ESIB obtained—through the NUSes—from the Presidencies to the EU. The breakthrough in this regard was the French Presidencies offer—obtained in particular through the hard work of Remi Bordu and UNEF-ID and Fage—to fund the European Student Convention in October 2000 in Paris with 300 representatives. This was an unprecedented event in ESIB history, as ESIB members traditionally gathered only twice annually at the BMs. The objective of the Convention was to prepare a Student Manifesto, the European national unions' visions of and demands for European HE and present it to the French Presidency of the EU.

Despite its legislative position in policy processes pertaining to education areas, the Council was rather inaccessible to ESIB. NUSes from the EU member states holding the Presidency would normally have contacts with their governments, but would rarely—if ever—speak on behalf of ESIB.

Although, the agenda of the troika Presidencies would be discussed in EC meetings, it would rarely be prioritised or concrete strategies prepared to influence it. In Bologna, ESIB had for the first time addressed European Ministers responsible for education collectively. In addition, in November 2000, under the French presidency and following the European Student Convention in Paris, an ESIB delegation was invited to attend and speak at the meeting of Council of Ministers for Education in Brussels. The session was followed by a press conference where Jack Lang, the French Minister of education, and Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner expressed their support for student involvement in the higher education decision-making processes. Also in 2000, CoP2001 met with representatives of the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which was in charge of the organisation of the Prague Ministerial Summit. SFS and Jacob Henricson from SFS and CoP2001 (and as of May 2001 also ESIB Chairperson) managed to secure funding to hold the 2nd Student Convention in Göteborg, Sweden in March 2001. This is how European Student Conventions became a tradition and ESIB members collectively began to meet four times yearly.

The recognition of ESIB in the BP—which was largely due to the effort of NUSes—at the same time strengthened NUSes involvement in ESIB. ESIB helped secure a project funded by the European Commission (and contracted to VVS), the »Student Follow-Up of the Implementation of Bologna Declaration«, which enabled a more structured and focused work on ESIB's input to the BP and its capacity building in this regard on the national and local levels as well. ESIB's Plan of Work for 2001 adopted at BM39 in October 2000 in Geneva, Switzerland—at the same time when the ESIB Manifesto from the 1st European Student

Convention was adopted—depicts well the organisational development and further priorities at the time: »ESIB has become without doubt the representative student organisation in the eyes of the major actors in the field of Higher Education. It is time now to go to the next step. (...) We have now to take advantage of ESIB's position to make our demands, our policies come true, to use the economic growth in most of our countries to build our European model of open education on the only base of one's intellectual capacities.«

TOWARDS THE PRAGUE MINISTERIAL SUMMIT

ESIB's preparation for the Prague Ministerial Summit was thorough: basically all corners were covered. ESIB participated at all major events concerning the BP and fielded a large delegation at the EUA Convention in Salamanca. The 2nd European Student Convention in Göteborg enabled quality preparation of the Student Göteborg Declaration, a succinct document accompanied by working group reports elaborating ESIB's position and policy papers on topics from QA and accreditation, transnational education, social implications of the EHEA, obstacles to mobility, European credit systems, degree systems to the role of HE in society and policy making and student involvement in the EHEA. Speaking at the Student Göteborg Convention, Thomas Östros, Minister of Education and Science in Sweden, stated that it was »very important for Swedish Presidency to the EU that student representatives should have a distinct voice in issues central to the future of education«. He also mentioned that ESIB was the only student organisation which was present at the Uppsala informal meeting of ministers of education and research (preceding the Prague Sum-

mit) and that »students must be able to actively participate in policy discussions at European level« (Speech ›Students' Voice is Necessary to the Future of Education in Europe' by Thomas Ŏstros, March 23, 2001).

The Declaration was adopted at BM40 at Casta Papiernicka, Slovakia—an impressive arrangement by šrvš to obtain that Special Facility of the Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for the BM—just few days before the Summit. A delegation of 10 invited ESIB delegates and another 8 NUS representatives that were included into their national delegations proceeded to the Prague Summit. Jacob Henricson, member of CoP2001 was just elected Chairperson of ESIB. His plenary address was scheduled in the official program as it was an observer seat in the Ministerial meeting.

In addition, the key Report submitted to the Ministers in preparation for the Prague Summit prepared by Pedro Lourtie and commissioned by the Bologna Follow-Up Group visibly referred to ESIB and its involvement with the BP: in the follow-up groups, the European Student Convention and the Student Göteborg Declaration. Louitier included the Declaration in the annex of the report and summarised in the text its main points: the fact that the Bologna Declaration failed to address the social implications of the process for students and that education should be considered a public good; that the system of credits should be based on the workload; that there should be a common European framework of criteria for accreditation and a compatible system of degrees; the need to remove both academic and social, economic and political obstacles; and finally that students should be recognised as partners in the BP.

ESIB participated in the Enlarged Follow-Up Group meetings and thus had insights in and op-

portunity to contribute to the preparation of the Draft Ministerial Communiqué. The actual policy impact of participating in these meetings and of overall involvement of ESIB and its members in the BP can be demonstrated through a comparison of direct citations from ESIB's Student Göteborg Declaration and Prague Ministerial Communiqué, which offer ample examples of direct »uploading« of ESIB's positions into the Prague Communiqué (see table).

WAKING UP OF THE »SLEEPING GIANT«

The Prague Ministerial Communiqué made two momentous and previously unprecedented political declarations regarding the essence of student representation in Europe. One concerns the principles of student involvement in HE governance. The Ministers politically affirmed both student involvement in the policy making towards the emerging EHEA, and student participation in the HE decision-making on all levels: institutional, national and European. In fact, starting with the Prague Communiqué and reiterated in later communiqués, student participation emerged as one of the EHEA principles. Second, ESIB was effectively granted a monopoly of student representation in the BP and in European HE policy-making in general. ESIB was acknowledged in Prague as the sole representative of the students and, in Berlin in 2003, together with several other stakeholders, obtained consultative membership to the BP.

I have known ESU when it was still ESIB, in the very early days of what was to become the »Bologna process«. When I designed proposals for this profound and coordinated movement of change, reform and convergence in European higher education, it was extremely clear in my mind that the main reason for doing so was to better serve stu-

BP PRAGUE COMMUNIQUÉ (2001)

BP	Prague Communiqué (2001)
<p>»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 BP is one of the key steps towards permanent and more formalised student involvement in all decision making bodies and discussion fora dealing with higher education on the European level.«</p>	<p>»Ministers stressed that the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area is needed and welcomed.«</p>
<p>»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.«</p>	<p>»The European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe and the Council of Europe should be consulted in the follow-up work.«</p> <p>»Ministers took note of the Convention of European higher education institutions held in Salamanca on 29–30 March and the recommendations of the Convention of European Students, held in Göteborg on 24–25 March, and appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) in the BP.«</p>
<p>»Although the Bologna Declaration pointed out the basic aspects of the European dimension of HE, it failed to address the social implications the process has on students.«</p> <p>»... we ask you, the ministers responsible for higher education, explicitly to write a social dimension into the implementation of the Bologna Declaration and to preserve higher education as a public good.«</p>	<p>»Ministers also reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process.«</p> <p>»(...) Ministers encouraged the follow-up group to arrange seminars to explore the following areas: (...) the social dimension, with specific attention to obstacles to mobility, and (...) student involvement.«</p>
<p>»ESIB strongly supports the idea of HE as a public good because HE must aim to meet the needs of society as a whole«.</p> <p>»Students are an equal part of HE community«.</p> <p>»Publicly funded HE must remain the main form of HE in the future.«</p>	<p>They supported the idea that HE should be considered a public good and is and will remain a public responsibility (regulations etc.), and that students are full members of the HE community.</p> <p>»Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other HEs.«</p>

dents, as individuals and citizens able to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Europe, its countries and regions.

This was not only because such a vision was indispensable for the Bologna Process to work, but also because I myself went through the atypical itinerary of a student with initial cultural, social and economic difficulties and European/international aspirations. ESIB/ESU has played a key role

Florian Kaiser (Executive Committee)

@KaiserFlorian

ESU in the future: A role model for Europe in tackling the challenges of diversity and equality with a true feeling of unity #ESU30years

in the later shaping of the »social dimension« of the European Higher Education Area. I may on occasions have a more demanding, »merit-based« vision of

what this social dimension ought to be if it is to be sustainable, but I have always found that ESU's contributions to policy-making, dissemination activities and concrete quality assurance procedures were particularly convincing; I would therefore like to encourage the leadership and membership of ESU and its member associations to keep as committed, determined and effective as over the past decade.

Guy Haug, co-designer of ERASMUS, TEMPUS, the Bologna process and the Agenda for the Modernisation of European Higher education

Many a higher education professor has quipped that her or his work would be so much easier if it weren't for the students. And often in the official meetings, seminars and conferences that have accompanied the Bologna process, Ministerial representatives have given me the same impression: "how much easier it would be to make plans for the European higher education if we didn't have to worry about the students".

But if ESIB/ESU had not insisted on participating in Bologna policy debates (because let's not

forget that they did have to insist), what might have happened? Of course the most likely outcome is that nothing much at all would have happened. Even the most deluded of education ministers and their representatives would have realised sooner or later the folly of making plans without involving the representatives of students for whom they are designed. But it would probably have taken a while for the house of cards to collapse—no doubt discrediting European higher education and setting back European development along the way.

Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meetings can be strange at the best of times, but without ESU present at the table, the mind boggles at the technocratic wizardry that might have been dreamed up there. What would the "Bologna toolkit" look like had students not been involved at all in its design? (I hate to think about this for too long). And would European policy texts have been written with emphasis on public responsibility and the social dimension of higher education without ESIB/ESU present in the debate? I doubt it.

As somebody who has been working in this strange and fascinating world of European higher education throughout the lifetime of the Bologna process, I have had the good fortune of being often challenged and educated by ESIB/ESU colleagues. And even more importantly, I have made many friends along the way who were important to me then, and remain important to me today. It's sometimes a bit disconcerting to see some of them turning up as today's Ministerial representatives at the BFUG. But then again, maybe that's a sign of progress. If not them, then who?

David Crosier, higher education system and policy analyst, currently working for Eurydice, but also worked for European University Association (EUA) and Council of Europe ●●

ESU AND THE TEMPTATION OF GOING GLOBAL

by Ligia Deca, Chairperson of ESU 2008–10

INTRODUCTION

The European Students' Union (ESU) is by definition an international organisation. Its mission to act as a voice of European students and to represent their interests at the European level, combined with past international experience of the member organisations, led to a natural interest to be involved in what happens outside the European fortress, especially since the global developments are increasingly influencing the way in which European societies as a whole are progressing.

Spanning from the relations with other student platforms of different continents to long term cooperation with UNESCO and Education International, ESU has dedicated efforts to maintaining a role on the international front. How did this interest evolve, what did it generate, and what might be the future, are questions that I will try to answer in a snapshot.

My perspective as an author is influenced by my past role as ESU Chairperson in 2008–10, as well as by the first-hand experience with the

UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education +10 (July 2010), as well as by the involvement in two European level projects with Education International, the global teachers' union. As such, some of the ESU international activities from that period might be better represented than others.

ESU AND THE COOPERATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOVEMENT

Since it became obvious in the late 1990's that the International Union of Students (IUS) is no longer a balanced and adequate voice for students' rights, ESU became interested in consolidating its links with other student platforms with similar mission and principles. This was, and still is not so easy, for several reasons: the vast differences in organisational culture, the problems with continuity and capacity, and sometimes, even different ways of understanding fundamental values, such as autonomy or democracy.

Representatives of ESU had to balance the legitimate drive to cooperate with fellow organisations from across the globe with obvious doubts related to legitimacy of the student leadership. Some of the student leaders that we met had

Throughout over 20 years of my work at UNESCO in higher education, I have had the pleasure to witness the growth of ESIB/ESU, its maturing and professionalization.

ESU has in fact been an active partner in most of the projects I provided leadership for while I was at UNESCO until 2011: the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention and the ENIC network, the 2002 Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications, the 2005 UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, and the 2011 Global Forum on Rankings.

After my departure from UNESCO, I am happy to witness that ESU has continued its active contribution to UNESCO, the latest being the 2012 UNESCO Congress on Open Educational Resources for which I was the Senior Consultant.

Although the faces and names kept changing, it was a pleasure to see the network grow and develop, becoming a Student's Union (ESU) rather than an Information Bureau (ESIB), placing itself as a major player in the Bologna Process as one of the E4 group (ENQA-EUA-EURASHE-ESU), gaining in professionalism with each new step and becoming an indispensable partner in higher education developments in Europe.

As someone who has devoted a number of years to global higher education, I will end by mentioning the important international role ESU has played and is still playing in networking and developing an international students' group, much needed to respond to the multiple challenges of higher education in an era of globalisation.

Stamenka Uvalic Trumbic, Independent Consultant, Global Higher Education, Former Chief of Section for Higher Education, UNESCO.

been in the same position for more than 10 years and some of them were far from being students and worked for governments. So indeed, independence of student organisations was also an issue in our perception: in some Arab and Latin American states it is difficult to find student organisations which are not heavily influenced (or even run) by governments or political parties and their representatives.

Understanding the different contexts and being flexible on principles, while not compromising the values ESU members hold as essential, has been key to maintaining relations over the past decades, but also key in ensuring the political and financial support from global organisations like UNESCO and Education International. In addition, ESU had to always be careful with the stigma of colonialism, which has been historically attached to European efforts to promote an initiative at the global level. In my experience, the proximity with the headquarters of organisations such as UNESCO and the preference for ESU to take the lead on organising global student meetings did not help much to overcome this suspicion.

The cooperation with other student platforms was linked heavily, especially since 1998, to UNESCO and its World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE). ESU was highly involved in the 1998, 2003 and 2009 editions, from being a member in the Programme Committee, to collecting and providing input, to the drafting of the Communiqués. ESIB had a statement towards the 1998 WCHE (<http://www.esu-online.org/news/article/6065/151/>), which dealt primarily with access to and quality of higher education, as well as highlighting the importance of student participation in decision-making. The 2009 WCHE+10 was an excellent opportunity to incentivise a discussion of common priorities with different student

platforms. In 2008 ESU set-up its International Cooperation Working Group (ICWG), coordinated by members, starting with VSS-UNES-USU Switzerland and NSU (later NSO) Norway until 2011 who were later joined by ÖH Austria and NUSUK United Kingdom. The working group was to lead the international cooperation of ESU, in connection with the Plan of Work of ESU and the political activities as steered by the Executive Committee of ESU. The biggest achievements of the work of 2008–10 are, in my view, the following:

- ◊ The adoption of the Global Student Statement towards UNESCO's WCHE+10 (9 July 2009), as the input of a large number of student regional platforms and thematic organisations recognised by UNESCO to the WCHE+10 (July 2010);
- ◊ The Action Plan for Global Student Dialogue (2009);
- ◊ The adoption of the Global Student Declaration (15 January 2010)
- ◊ The drafting and endorsement of a Global Student Statement towards the G8/G20 Summit in Toronto, Canada (summer 2010, initiated by the Canadian Federation of Students).

Each of these documents had a focus on improving the global cooperation of the student movement, as well as defining key priorities for cooperation. The Global Student Declaration underlined two issues for cooperation, firstly addressing financing and commodification of higher education, as well as students' rights and student solidarity. The central idea was to agree on a common

World Charter on Students' Rights that could be used as a policy tool by the partner organisations. This work was followed by drafting a Division of Responsibilities, clarifying the different roles for each participating student organisation in the follow-up to the Declaration. But this was to no great effect, as the actual follow-up ran into a number of obstacles.

Originally, the International Cooperation Working Group aimed at establishing a new global structure for the representation of students, but plans were narrowed down significantly following the obvious lack of willingness from the participating organisations and the somewhat unclear situation with IUS. Among the first steps after the meetings around the 2009 WCHE+10 was to set up the 'communication committee' that consisted, inter alia, of the following organisations, with which ESU has kept as close contact as possible over the years:

- ◊ All-African Student Union (AASU)
- ◊ Asian Student Association (ASA)
- ◊ European Students' Union (ESU)
- ◊ General Union of Arab Students (GUAS)
- ◊ Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes (OCLAE)
- ◊ National Union of Students Australia (NUSA)
- ◊ Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)
- ◊ United States Students Association (USSA).

Interestingly enough, ESU's ICWG lists in its reports a number of other activities, such as attending meetings of the National Union of Syrian Students (2010) or of the Moscow State University Student Union and International Fraternity of Student Organisations and Youth that was in 2010 an emerging organisation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). ESU also witnessed the attempt to create a South-East Asian

Taina Moisander (Vice-Chairperson)

@TainaMois

ESU influences the agenda and initiatives on what kind of policy is put forward from the European level and is regarded as the main stakeholder in the EU for HE #ESU30years

Student Platform, facilitated by events organised through a project titled ACCESS ASEAN. The project was focused on internationalisation between the two regions, but the

grassroots initiative that students showed at an event in 2010 in Bangkok was silenced rapidly by the representatives of the hierarchical university structures in that region. Even though a Student Declaration was put forward, encouraged by ESU, there was little enthusiasm to support such a move by the rectors and the academics. It became clear that (independent) student organisations were seen as dangerous sources for social unrest in the region.

Over the years we have struggled with identifying which are the most representative partners for dialogue, or which are representative at all, for that matter. This blur seems to continue while the dilemma persists regarding whether the best approach is to try to establish a dialogue structure with 'ESU type' of continental or regional student organisations or whether to approach active national unions of students individually. There seems to be no 'one size fits all' solution, as the reliability of contacts with various types of student structures is defined by the socio-political context

and by the leadership of organisations. Manifest in this sense was the attempt of the Asian Student Association (ASA) to apply for project funding from UNESCO in order to organise a meeting of the Global Student Movement in 2010, according to the commitments made after signing the Declaration. The lack of capacity on the side of ASA, even if ESU did provide significant support, prevented the submission of an application to receive UNESCO funds.

However, ESU revised this policy on which partners to engage with in late 2011. One of the actions ICWG has started is the mapping of student organisations across the globe. This has been somewhat of a necessity ahead of hosting the Global Student Leadership Summit in London (September 2012). Coming from the earlier difficulties to follow up with meetings of the Global Student Movement between the regional platforms, the invitation to London has been pragmatically extended to national unions of students. The aim has been to reset the strategy and to engage into a global exchange of information without any explicit expectations on how to further organise the global communication. This event, combined with an up to date overview through the mapping, could be an extremely valuable start to develop a new strategy for international cooperation, something that the ICWG plans to discuss at ESU's 63rd Board Meeting in Malta late in 2012.

Dialogue is indeed a two way street. The ICWG report for ESU's 57th Board Meeting (2010) underlines that international cooperation [...] is not possible without the mutual commitment and ownership of the other organisations as well.' Since the division of work done in 2009 was not really successful, at least from the author's point of view, the ICWG had to reinvent itself and decide on the best way forward. ESU could not invest more re-

sources in a project that is only half-desired by the other partners, while being accused of trying to sabotage previous efforts (IUS) or trying to colonise the global student movement with European principles.

The latest proposals put on the table by the ICWG, in connection to the London Student Leadership Summit, is to either set up an International Students Information Bureau (ISIB)—defined as »an international platform for networking, exchange and information between students«—or the International Student Office (ISO), which is the more focused on representation and can be considered the more institutionalised version of the first option. These ideas, lifted partly from the history book on the founding of WESIB/ESIB/ESU, remain to be discussed, but it would be interesting to see whether such proposals will be deemed as adequate in the current context.

From my point of view, the conditions for international student cooperation were slightly more favourable in 2009, due to the WCHE+10. UNESCO was much keener to support global student meetings and the momentum seemed to be there, compared to the current international context, where the economic interactions and geo-

politics are even more complicated in light of the economic crisis. . In addition, UNESCO is undergoing a restructuring process, where higher education is more integrated into general educational policy and thus where perhaps less special attention is given to higher education issues. Furthermore, UNESCO's formal relations with partners in the third sector are also under review. Looking at all these developments, one could argue that



without good communication and clear priorities of the student movement agreed on the global level, it might be difficult to be in the picture of international intergovernmental policy on higher education.

ESU AND GLOBAL POLITICS—UNESCO, EI, OECD AND THE WORLD BANK

One of ESU's strengths is building relations with in political arenas. Representatives of ESU have built longstanding relations with UNESCO (including UNESCO-CEPES) over the years—through continuous contributions to the events linked to high-

With the continuous expansion of higher education, the rapidity and complexity of changes it is undergoing in most nations of the world, it is essential that students' voices and views are taken into account. It is after all they who are the most directly affected by reforms and new developments in teaching and learning, in research and in governance of the higher education institutions. The ESU and its ancestor ESIB, have been more than simply the vehicle speaking on behalf of the students of Europe. This student organization has influenced policy and strategy of the EU, of the Bologna Ministers and of the various agencies and bodies they have put in place. The organization and its successive leaders have demonstrated the value of student input at all levels of higher education governance. Furthermore, they have made this value visible well-beyond the borders of Europe by reaching out to other student groups around the world. Well-done ESU!

Eva Egron Polak, Secretary General of the International Association of Universities (IAU)

er education, through well-maintained links with key UNESCO officials (or former officials) and even by developing studies such as the 2007 »Quality in cross-border higher education' survey on the use of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. ESU was informally seen as »the most reliable partner« for UNESCO in supporting activities aimed to foster global student dialogue and to organise meetings

of the student organisations that were in some type of relations with UNESCO.

Furthermore, ESU's influence and participation in the preparation of WCHE+10 and the drafting of the Communiqué (as well as the follow-up) generated a number of important additions along the priorities included in the Global Student Statement, such as article 52e from the WCHE+10 Communiqué: »Call for action—UNESCO: Enhance student participation in UNESCO Forums and support global student dialogue«. It is perhaps interesting to note that several formulations in the WVHE+10 Communiqué were worked out by the students present in the conference as coordinated by ESU. These concrete contributions were made on themes such as higher education as a human right, public responsibility and public good; stakeholder participation; removal of references to tuition fees and university rankings; emphasis on social responsibility and access and support for students.

The continuous cooperation between UNESCO and ESU was sealed with ESU entering into »operational relations« with UNESCO in 2009, a formal step, but nonetheless an important brick in building trust within an intergovernmental bureaucracy.

Perhaps one of the most unsung successful relations that ESU had for fostering global student dialogue, was the relation with Education International (EI). The continuous support and lobby of the EI leadership helped ESU not only to financially organise global student dialogue meetings, but also to create its initial UNESCO connections and sometimes also helped in reaching out to partners in other world regions.

Understanding the difficulties of global cooperation in a structure such as EI, which is an umbrella for national academic staff trade unions,

proved to be an extremely valuable asset that EI passed on to ESU. In addition, EI and ESU worked together intensely in the framework of the Bologna Process, through two recent campaigns: on ›Let's Go‹ on student and staff mobility (2007–2008) and ›Time for Student Centred Learning‹ (T4SCL).

Two formal agreements were signed between ESU and EI in 2004 and 2010 respectively. We agreed on cooperation to exchange information between us and to support fighting the commoditisation of education within the circles of the World Trade Organisation, we also agreed on common involvement in OECD's AHELO project and thematic reviews of tertiary education, and we committed to cooperation for the follow-up of the UNESCO WCHÉ+10 conference and active participation within the UNESCO Collective Consultations of NGOs. Furthermore, ESU's work on the GATS agreement was highly dependent on the information generously provided by EI for a number of years. One key person in this long term special relationship between ESU and EI was Monique Fouilhoux, who retired in 2011 from her position as Deputy Secretary General, but who continuously believed in cooperation between student and staff representatives and can be regarded as the force behind changing the mentalities in this sense.

The efforts that ESU has made to establish itself within the OECD and the World Bank are more recent in their starting point, but nonetheless relevant. With the OECD heavily investing in the AHELO project, while the World Bank launched its 2020 Education Strategy, it became obvious that ESU needed to establish itself more in relation with these bodies, especially in a context where UNESCO seemed to have less and less support from member governments for work in the higher education arena. Since 2010, ESU has included more provisions to work more closely with these bod-

ies and it seems that ESU is informally included in most, if not all higher education related events and projects. However, the OECD seemed reluctant to sign a formal agreement with ESU in 2011 pointing to formal reasons.

ESU cooperates very well also with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and joined efforts many times for issues of common interest towards UNESCO, OECD or other bodies. As with UNESCO and EI, solid and longstanding relations especially with the IAU Secretariat reinforce ESU's ability to play in the international policy arena.

CONCLUSIONS

ESU's members were always supportive of international involvement. Even the unions which were most vocal about better and more careful prioritisation of working areas, projects and policy, never voiced real concerns regarding ESU's capacity to continue to work on global student dialogue and international cooperation. This area is perhaps also seen as a priority at the national level, in some cases influenced by the memory of the split global student movement in the more troubled ›Cold War‹ times.

In the context of globalisation and semi-failed global student institutionalised cooperation attempts, the relentless interest for engagement in cooperation with similar student representation structures is perhaps due to curiosity, need for legitimacy towards supra-national institutions or organisations, as well as the natural need to be part of a broader community. Countless partnerships were built between ESU members and other

*Rok Primozic, (Vice-Chairperson) @RokPrim
ESU will be even bigger, stronger and more united group of students who will tell the world we are not consumers. Oh, and student representatives might get quite old because of Life-Long-Learning #ESU30years*

national or thematic student organisations on an individual basis, without a real central reference point at the esu level until the icwg. The icwg is one of the most successful examples of working groups started by esu members, which have a

*Karina Ufert (Chairperson) @KarinaUfert
ESU re-framing public discourse about future of
education and future of our societies #educa-
tionisarightnotprivilege #ESU2020*

life outside of the ›usual‹ set of priorities set by the Plan of Work of esu. Even though icwg has been dependent on the heavy support of the esu Secretariat and the elected representatives, the icwg always found a way to push for esu's international involvement, even when future prospects seemed bleak. This is a strength that should be recognised and perhaps replicated in other areas.

However, there is something to be said about international cooperation. Unless it is backed by a profound understanding about the limitations related to differences in context—be it about political, economic and even cultural frameworks—it can easily get too enthusiastic and will lead to disappointment. The creation of global structures for cooperation (even e-mail lists in this era) seems to be extremely resource intensive and not very popular among all regional platforms or student unions. In order to build the confidence necessary to move towards a more multilateral cooperation, esu should build and maintain solid and long-standing bilateral links with other regional and national student platforms.

In my view, another push for a formal ius type of structure, which includes decision-making

mechanisms and goals for common representation (as democratic as they might be) is doomed to fail in a world more and more inward looking, despite the globalisation phenomenon. However, building strong links with strong, viable and democratic organisations is perhaps the most sustainable way of moving forward. And perhaps the Global Student Leadership Summit in London will provide a breath of fresh air and a cooperation mechanism for student organisations across the world which will be light enough to function in an extremely diverse student representation landscape, but functional enough in order to ensure the global voice that students need so badly.

And this voice is needed also because the balance of power among international organisations seems to be shifting. The equilibrium given by the ›UNESCO-OECD‹ binomial approach in terms of higher education policy no longer exists and more players, such as the World Bank and even the ›new kids on the block‹ like the Qatar Foundation, backed by a single government, are becoming influential and resourceful players.

In this context, esu needs to strengthen its role and influence towards these emerging actors, with or without the support of other sister-organisations. Solidarity, efforts of the joint global student movement and peer input certainly have a role to play, but esu owes it to its members to establish itself as a strong voice within the international field as a legitimate voice for European students, no matter what the future holds for international student cooperation. ●●

ESU HITTING BELOW (AND ABOVE) ITS WEIGHT—THE ROLE IN NATIONAL AND GLOBAL ARENAS

by Johan Almqvist, Chairperson of ESIB, 2004

INTRODUCTION

One of the guiding principles of ESU as an organisation has been to focus on European issues (be they at the EU level or beyond), and keep out of policymaking at the regional (meaning world regions) and national level. However, there have been a number of notable exceptions to this principle over the years, with diverging motives and varying success.

Traditionally, even around its twentieth year of existence (2002), ESIB still needed to deduce its influence and legitimacy from its member unions. At times, member unions would also lean on ESIB to add weight to their arguments in national debates.

In theory, this seems like a simple proposition: meet the ministry of education or the rectors' conference of X and tell them you completely agree with NUS-X's policy.

However, this was not always as straightforward as one could hope. Firstly, what if NUS-X's policy wasn't in line with ESIB's policies? This prob-

lem never quite materialised because the ministry of X would usually be ignorant of ESIB's policies, or the discrepancy could be explained by »local variations«. Being in favour of university autonomy does not necessarily contradict asking for stricter regulations to protect against corrupt administrators. More difficult, then, was the second type of problem: What if there were two member unions

The European Students' Union fulfils an important role as a channel of communication between students in Europe and the OECD's work on higher education. It brings together, and acts as a conduit for, the views of so many young (and not so young) people in a complex policy environment which is not a straightforward task. ESU (and before it ESIB) has done a tremendous job in synthesising and advocating the views of students on a wide range of issues. We were all students once and yet we do not always find it easy to provide a space for the student voice in policy debates. The European Students' Union has always contributed in a lucid, constructive and focused way to the biennial General Conference of the IMHE programme as well as in other venues. We wish you every success in the next thirty years.

Barbara Ischinger, Director for Education, OECD

European higher education has benefited greatly from the presence of a strong student organisation, one that has been consistently led by a mature group of student leaders. The leadership of student organisations is transitory but—most remarkably—ESIB/ESU has managed to ensure continuity of vision over the years. Since its creation in 2001, the European University Association (EUA) set as a high priority its partnership with ESIB/ESU in developing European higher education policies. This partnership has been most evident in the Bologna Follow-up Group and in the »E4« (the group that developed the European quality assurance framework), in inviting contributions from ESIB/ESU to EUA's conferences and identifying students to participate in the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme. The work of ESIB/ESU has been exemplary and its benefits manifold. On a personal level, it has been a great pleasure working with ESIB/ESU: so many former student leaders have become friends and colleagues over the years.

Andree Sursock, Senior adviser, European University Association (EUA)

in X, who had opposite policies, or when there are internal factions within NUS-X with opposing views?

NATIONAL CONFLICTS

An example of this was when the conservative government of Austria wanted to change the law governing the election procedures for ÖH. The current executive (with a pendant to the opposition) opposed this legislation vehemently, and invited the ESIB chairperson to Vienna to meet with a number of people on the matter.

The trip to Vienna involved a number of high-level meetings at the parliament, the ministry and finally at the Hofburg (the offices of the president) where I was led into a state room through a secret

passage dissimilated in the wall to be received by the president of the republic. In addition, journalists from several Austrian newspapers and other media outlets wanted to interview me.

The issue was sensitive because a large minority of the Austrian NUS supported the new legislation, while the majority was heavily opposed to it—the legislation was likely to turn the tables quite drastically. What opinion was ESIB to have of this case, and should ESIB have had an opinion at all?

The NUS representatives had brought me to Vienna to convince the government to drop the proposed legislation, or else I was supposed to try to convince the president to veto the law after it had passed parliament. This was a difficult situation for many reasons: did ESIB really have any solid ground to form an opinion on it, and was it politically clever to voice such an opinion when the NUS' opinion would swing to the opposite if the law did pass?

Luckily, ESIB's membership charter had been signed just half a year earlier at the Board Meeting in Banja Luka, thanks to the efforts of the (second) Strategic Development Committee (SDC, see photo). As the chairperson I felt I could reiterate one of the membership charter's articles that said that ESIB members should be democratic as well as run and controlled by students. The proposed legislation was neither proposed nor endorsed by the decision-making assembly of ÖH, hence this change to the NUS' statutes (which, in the case of ÖH, had the form of national legislation) would pull into doubt whether the organisation was controlled by students or the national assembly of Austria and would also question the organisation's eligibility for ESIB membership.

EUROPEAN INSTEAD OF NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE?

A completely different scenario arose when ESU (then ESIB) was asked by several national quality assurance agencies to provide experts for quality reviews of higher education institutions. The agencies' motives were quite varied (from the French CNE who wanted to tap into our exposure to different QA systems, to the Danish ministry who believed Danish students would not be able to review their own university in a fair and equal manner in a nationwide subject review). Our involvement with EUA also brought ESU representatives into national QA reviews in countries such as Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

These assignments themselves were not controversial, but participating in a quality review panel in an ESU member country could bring with it challenging discussions about national higher education policies. In such discussions the NUS' point of view had to be taken into consideration—all the more difficult when there were several competing ESU members present even at the same university, such as in France. Luckily, most quality assur-

ance reports offered sufficient room for suggestions for improvement that were uncontroversial between UNEF and LA FAGE.

The French situation grew even more interesting when the French higher education press understood what ESIB was and started regular interviews with the ESIB EC on matters that were controversial between the two French national unions. Press coverage wasn't something ESIB



had very much of, so this was a great opportunity to showcase the organisations, but the interview themes were both controversial and sometimes hard to grasp for someone who did not closely follow the national French discussion.

Student involvement in quality assurance is a distinct feature of the EHEA. Looking back at 10 years of close collaboration with ESIB/ESU in quality assurance at European level, one can say that quality assurance would look different without that involvement. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG), which were developed in close collaboration of institutions, students and agencies, provide a good example. They have a significant impact on internal and external quality assurance processes all over the EHEA. Hence, they also affect directly the development of the learning conditions in the institutions. This demonstrates how important it is for students to have their voice raised at European level and to be part of any decision making in this field.

Stakeholders and actors in quality assurance will always have diverse needs and interests. From the agency perspective I can say that collaborating with all relevant stakeholders in designing and implementing quality assurance processes is complicated and time consuming. However, it's the only way of assuring that quality assurance does not turn into an end in itself but meets the needs of the society at large, the institutions and the students.

Dr Achim Hopbach, President of ENQA

AT THE OTHER END OF THE SCALE

At the global level, esu's role was a subject under steady discussion throughout the years. Some members maintained that as the most powerful and resourceful regional organisation, esu should take the lead role in international student cooperation. On the other hand, other members were of the strict opinion that esu should completely ignore this level and not involve itself in any discussions beyond the European level. Some member unions had long-standing memberships with ius (the International Union of Students) while

others had left that organisation in the fifties and sixties, and never looked back.

At the same time, regional student organisations were being formed in other areas, notably South America, Asia and Africa. esib's contacts with these organisations (or NUSes in these regions) were quite sporadic. The partnership with eua brought esu into a number of projects in other regions, and esu representatives would get in touch with local student representatives to try and cooperate or at least learn their positions on the project in question. Often, these meetings would result in quite shocking experiences as student leaders from other parts of the world where struggling against political oppression, food or housing needs that were worse than what esu representatives could imagine. Some of the most shocking stories I can recall myself were told from Colombia and Zimbabwe, where student representatives feared for their life every day. Taking these impressions back to esu meetings where board members criticised the ec for engaging in these meetings caused frustration and despair.

LOOKING AHEAD

It's been eight years since I left the ec, and I have not been following esu's evolution very closely since. From my time in the ec, I recall meeting previous esib representatives who were amazed that we still had the same debates they'd had. Hadn't we gotten ahead one bit?

I can only imagine that today's esu representatives recognise many of the experiences above—but I do not see this as an organisational weakness. These considerations are at the heart of what esu should be, and as members' expectations on esu vary over time, these discussions will have to be had anew. ●●

EQUALITY: WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

by Alex Bols, Secretary General of ESIB, 2001–04 and George-Konstantinos Charonis, Academic Affairs Committee of ESU, 2010–11

INTRODUCTION

So what is the issue with equality? When we were asked to write about the impact of ESU to challenge societal inequalities it was with mixed feelings that we approached the task. When planning a 30th anniversary publication it is important to look back and celebrate the progress, and there have clearly been many successes, not least the way in which member national unions champion equality has significantly altered in the last 30 years. However, it still feels like progress has been too limited and too slow.

In this chapter we will highlight some of the developments in the last thirty years but also identify areas where more can still be done. ESU has done much to raise equality issues in international policy making, particularly through championing the social dimension and widening access to higher education to all. ESU has also spoken about gender equality within its own processes, and the role of the strong female ESU Chairs from

Eastern European countries—see further the Witches of East chapter—and raising questions about gender balanced delegations and ESU committees have raised the profile of these questions. But whilst there is still

more that could be done on gender equality there has been little progress on other questions of equality with

relative silence surrounding issues of discrimination based on disability, race or sexuality.

Anniversaries are often used to celebrate everything that has been achieved but they are also a useful opportunity to step back and consider what more can be done. We hope this chapter balances this dual aim.

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

It was when higher education policy making became an issue at the European level that the role of ESU in championing equality really began to take hold. It is no coincidence that whilst the 1999 Bologna Declaration of Ministers referred obliquely

*Karl Agius, Membership Coordinator @agiuskarl
I see ESU growing up and expanding in its members. New members will insert new blood and new HE challenges in ESU #ESU30years*

to »intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions« of higher education that by 2001, when students and universities were first officially included in the Bologna Process, the emphasis on the social dimension went much further. The Prague Communiqué, resulting from the 2001 Ministerial Summit, outlined that »Ministers also reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, to

take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process.« The communiqué explicitly recognised the role of ESU, through the Student Göteborg Declaration, in highlighting the importance of the social dimension of higher education.

Over subsequent Ministerial Summits this went further with the 2003 Berlin Communiqué incorporating the social dimension explicitly and the 2007 London Communiqué defining the social dimension as »the student body, entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations.« The London statement went on to say that at the following Ministerial Summit they would report on their national strategies and policies, including »action plans and measures to evaluate their effectiveness«.

It is probably ESU's role in championing the social dimension as an integral part of the development of a European Higher Education Area that will have the most lasting effect on enhancing equal access to higher education. As the Process towards the EHEA has developed there has been a move from simply defining the problem to bringing together data on under-represented groups to act as a form of peer-group pressure to tackle inequality. ESU's Bologna With Student Eyes, EUA's Trends publications and the stocktaking documents have all started to track data in Bologna countries of participation based on gender and social background and identifying ways in which this inequality can be challenged.

This European level articulation of the principle of ensuring that all those with the ability to benefit from higher education should be supported to do so, and the social and also economic imperatives of doing this has driven the equality agenda at the national level. However it is worth emphasising that the national context is particu-

ESIB, now ESU, became a central force in the Bologna Process by convincing the 2001 Prague Ministerial Conference that this process should have a social dimension. Under the heading *The social dimension in their 2005 Bergen Communiqué*, Ministers stated that *We renew our commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all and stress the need for appropriate conditions so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. This is as a reflection of the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights stating that higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*

The right to higher education is a right for each individual. Ministers also wish to share the societal aspiration that the student body should reflect the diversity of our populations (2007 London Communiqué). However, data are not generally available in the European Higher Education Area and this remains wishful thinking.

My challenge to ESU is to continue the fight for the right to higher education for all, without waiting for new sociological data. It is a shame that Ministers, more than sixty years after the Declaration of Human Rights, are introducing new formulations in stead of taking action.

My hope is that ESU will recruit into the next generation of ministers of education and get some action started.

Per Nyborg, Chair, Council of Europe Committee for Higher Education and Research 2001–03, Head, Bologna Process Secretariat 2003–05



larly important in this area with specific groups particularly under-represented, whether certain ethnic minorities, migrants or rural populations. This point about developing a tailored approach is also true of different institutions and even subject disciplines. They will have different groups that are under-represented in their institution or discipline, which highlights the importance of the data to make informed choices when developing strategies and that these strategies are sufficiently nuanced. It is therefore positive that many national unions are strongly engaged in these debates, but maybe there is more that esu can do to support NUSes in being able to engage effectively the issues.

esu has long outlined some of the different ways in which these inequalities can be tackled, but also recognising that different approaches will be needed to tackle different issues. In some cas-

es there will need to be tailored local responses to tackling inequality, in others a more structural approach is necessary. These structural processes can include targeted financial support; information, advice and guidance for particular groups; or developing flexible provision that is responsive to the needs of students—this might include new qualifications, supporting students to study more slowly through less-intensive study or even by accelerating the pace of study.

DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO

However there is still a perception that whilst equality is important to esu and some national unions, there is still a long way to go before all members could be said to be effectively challenging and championing equality in education.

ESU has a strong track-record on tackling gender discrimination, and indeed ran several projects and produced resources for national

unions, such as quotas, at least internally within ESU, pointing to great improvements in gender equality, both within ESU as well as within their own national unions.

The close collaboration between ESU and EI must continue in defense of higher education as a public responsibility, based on public funding. Tuition fees are socially unfair and in contradiction to higher education as a human and social right. Collegial governance with active participation of both students and teachers is a prerequisite for maintaining universities. Hierarchical managerialism will reduce universities to service providers for short term interests of private industry and governments. We must maintain the view that high quality education is created in the interaction between students and teachers. I hope to continue the good and close cooperation between ESU and EI in defending higher education as a human and social right and not a commodity, in fighting for equal opportunities and in promoting the quality of higher education founded in the idea of students as students and not clients or customers.

Jens Vraa Jensen, chair of the Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) of Education International in Europe (EITUCE), former activist of DSF (Danish Student Union)

unions including a Gender Equality handbook in the mid-1990s. The establishment of the Gender Equality Cross Committee in the mid-2000s and raising the question of gender quotas has also resulted in much debate which has helped challenge people's perceptions and stereotypes in relation to gender equality. It has resulted in interesting discussions surrounding the need to introduce structural processes, such as quotas, to overcome centuries of oppression. Whereas other national unions have focused on gender equality with a view to equal treatment between men and women, some unions question the need for continuing structural measures promoting gender equal-

ity, such as quotas, at least internally within ESU, pointing to great improvements in gender equality, both within ESU as well as within their own national unions.

However, whilst ESU has been at the forefront of championing gender equality this should not be seen as a fig-leaf to justify the lack of action in other dimensions of equality. Questions surrounding equal treatment of migrants, ethnic minorities—including the Roma population—and different sexualities, if discussed at all can still provoke strong attitudes amongst some members. It is not enough just to have organisations like IGLYO (International Gay and Lesbian Youth Organisation) and FEMYSO (Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations) as partners, and occasionally mutter the odd platitudes about equality, but rather consider what more could be done to ensure to their active engagement in ESU's activities and challenge prejudice where it exists. If ESU meetings can't be safe spaces then we will never be truly able to champion equality in the wider academic community. It is by discussing difficult topics, and through talking help educate, that we will foster greater understanding of the benefits of diversity.

In addition whilst ethnicity and sexuality are occasionally discussed within ESU, it seems like the question of engaging disabled students is something that people would prefer not to discuss as it is »just too difficult to deal with«. One of my abiding memories with ESIB, as it was then, was when we organised a pre-Board Meeting seminar on equality in Sofia. At that event we ran training for national unions on equality issues, launching a European Students' Handbook on Equality and Equal Access to Higher Education and it was a really interesting event, with the Bulgarian President addressing the delegates. Then just days

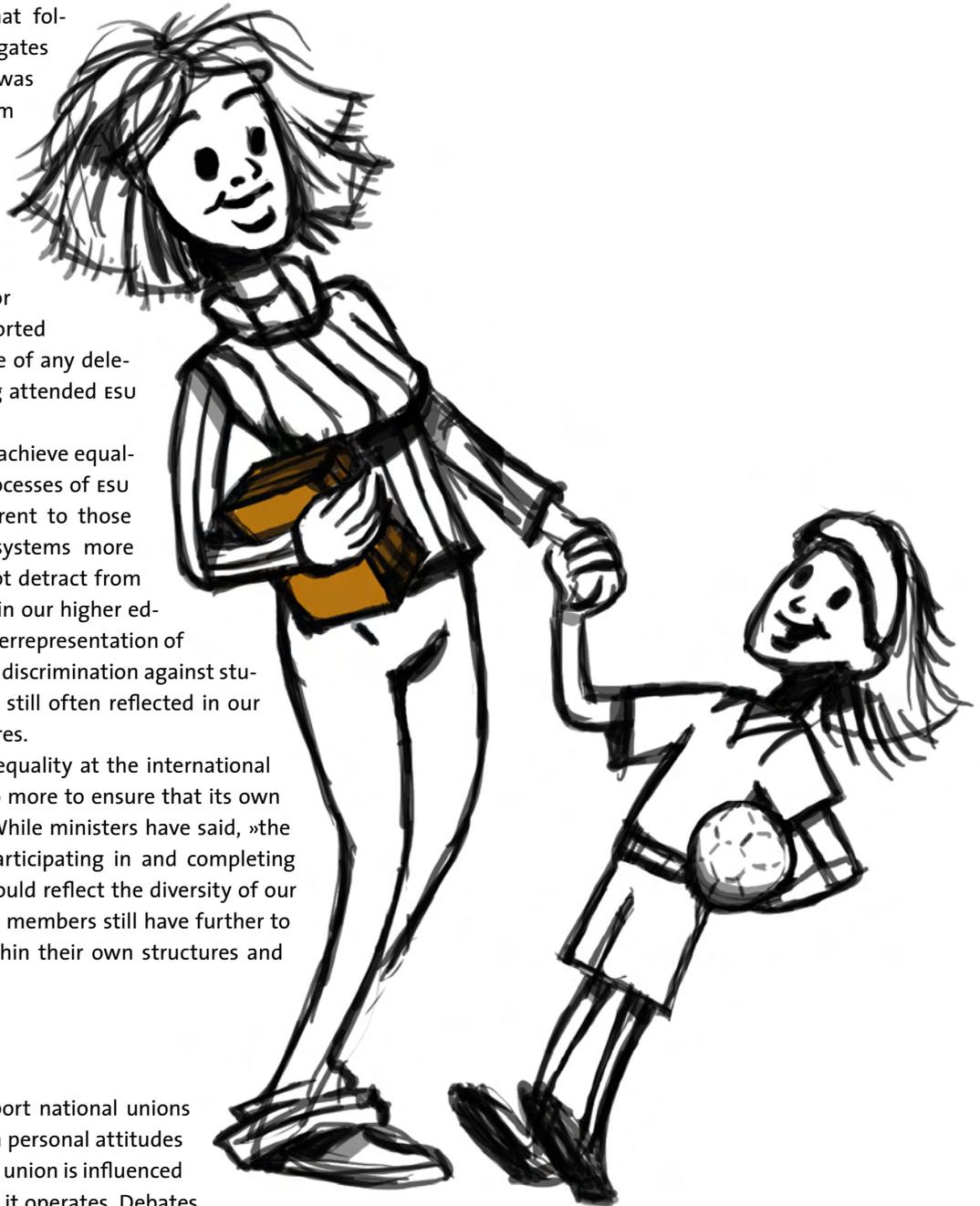
later, at the Board Meeting that followed, one of the national delegates was deaf and, if we are honest, was almost completely excluded from discussions due to an organisational inability to deal with someone that couldn't hear. On another occasion a delegate taking strong anti-depression medication was told off for sleeping rather than being supported to engage and we are not aware of any delegates in wheelchairs ever having attended ESU events.

The appropriate measures to achieve equality within the structures and processes of ESU and its members may be different to those required in higher education systems more broadly. However, this should not detract from the fact that inequality present in our higher education systems, such as the underrepresentation of certain demographic groups and discrimination against students based on their identity, is still often reflected in our very own representation structures.

If ESU is going to champion equality at the international and national level it needs to do more to ensure that its own processes are more accessible. While ministers have said, »the student population entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations,« ESU and indeed its members still have further to go to effectively reflect this within their own structures and representation.

FINAL THOUGHTS ...

When considering how we support national unions to discuss equality and their own personal attitudes we should never forget that each union is influenced by the national context in which it operates. Debates



on equality, whether about gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability vary significantly from country to country, not least due to different

historical, political and cultural contexts. Despite institutional memory, a high turnover of elected representatives both in ESU and its member unions often results in prolonged debates that can sometimes see recycled arguments and little overall progress. It is important that these discussions are not based, however unconsciously, on a sense of cultural superiority and cultural imperialism but that better understanding of intercultural dialogue might provide a more welcoming atmosphere to discuss these issues from time to time.

In conclusion, thirty years of successful collaboration amongst the students of Europe provides a great opportunity for ESU to look back and reflect, to celebrate as well as critically assess progress, with a view to building on the successes and going on to achieve greater achievements. ESU should be rightly proud of the significant impact through championing equal access to higher education in European policy-making, has made some honourable efforts at supporting national unions to influence and reflect on their national

situations but should consider how it could better engage the full diversity of students within its own structures. ●●

Yes, it has been important for ESIB/ESU to exist. Because it has been the main driver and the motive force for all democratic values characterising the European Higher Education Area today: considering higher education a public good and a public responsibility; bringing social dimension high on the agenda of the Bologna Process; recognising students as full members of the higher education community, and not as consumers or customers; recognising students as full partners in higher education governance. And, also, because it has been the catalyst for shifting the educational paradigm to student-centred learning. However, much more have to be done in the future. Primarily in order to preserve what has been achieved. But, more importantly, in order to further improve it and widen it. Perhaps, the notion of the »student-centred university« may be a new vision for the years to come. In this regard, the existence of ESU will continue to be important for the European higher education.

Dionyssis Kladis, Professor in higher education policy, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, Former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece

THE FIVE WITCHES OF THE EAST—THE STORIES OF ESU'S FEMALE CHAIRPERSONS

by Jens Jungblut

Among the sources of most tension within ESU are the elections for the leadership of the organisation. Debates about regional blocs, lobbying strategies, en bloc voting, network pressure, political deals etc. characterise many coffee break moments at the ESU Board Meetings. In this context, gender equality can often play a role: in connection with the regional blocs, the stereotypical divide of »gender-equal Northern and Western European national unions« versus »gender-unequal Southern and Eastern European unions« is created. However, when observing the election record for the Chairperson of ESU since 1997, when the organisation was first led by a natural person and not by an NUS, one finds that all five female Chairpersons that have been elected came from unions of Central-Eastern or South-Eastern Europe, while

all chairs from Western or Northern Europe have been male.

In a quest to find out a few more details about those five women, they have been asked to look back at their time as ESU Chairs touching on gender equality as well as the influence of the regional background on gender issues within ESU. On the following pages you can read interviews conducted by E-Mail, delivering a look into ESU's state of affairs as well as ESU's organisational history since 1997. I want to thank the five »witches of the east« for answering my questions and providing pictures and I hope you enjoy reading what they think about ESU.

Elisabeth Gehrke (Executive Committee)

@elisabethgehrke

I want to see much more cross-regional dialog and transparency. In the future I hope to see that we are more effective and have a better working environment. In addition I see us taking over one of the smaller European countries like Lichtenstein #ESU30years



AGNIESZKA (BOLIMOWSKA) SOCHA

ESIB/ESU chair from January to December 1997

Country/NUS: Poland, Polish Students' Association (zsp)

Positions on the national level: International Officer of zsp 1996–98;

Positions in ESU: Chairperson 1997;

Subject studied: MA in international economic and political relations at Warsaw School of Economics;

How did you become the first ESIB/ESU Chairperson and why was the system changed from an NUS leading the organisation to individuals chairing it?

Introducing the Executive Committee (EC) as well as the Chairperson instead of an NUS to lead the organisation was the next step in a natural development and transformation, which changed a former student information sharing bureau into a strong European student union. The EC was elected each year and was a decision-making forum between bi-annual Board Meetings as it should meet at least four times a year. Being a political authority of ESIB, the EC was responsible for external representation as well as for coordination of working groups and other permanent working structures, while it reported to the Board. The new structure was all the time in close contact with the Secretariat.

I became the first Chairperson of ESIB at Board Meeting 32 in Nijmegen. As far as I can remember, there were only a few candidates for this position, and after the voting, I was happy to know that I was elected.

What was your motivation to run for Chairperson and how did the lobbying and election work?

Since Board Meeting 32 was the second BM that I participated in, the fact that I was elected to be the Chairperson gave me a lot of motivation and energy to work. It was an honour to chair the organisation but also a big challenge for me.

Of course, before the election I was busy with lobbying. During interesting and sometimes very long talks and meetings, I was mainly presenting my activities in the Polish Students' Association (zsp) and also my vision and ideas how I would like to act as the Chairperson to prove that I am the right candidate. My mates from zsp actively supported my lobbying efforts as well.

How was your time in office? What were the biggest challenges, funniest or favourite moments and did you ever have the feeling that you were encountering problems connected to your gender?

The EC and Chairperson were completely new structures in ESIB. We spent many hours within the EC and also with the ESIB director on discussing how to divide duties and responsibilities to be efficient and to react fast to student matters arising on the way. The biggest challenge was to be active at the national and the European level at the same time.

I was still very busy since I was the International Officer of zsp at the time of being Chair of ESIB and actively participated in debates on higher education in Poland.

It was a wonderful time as in general I was involved in many projects, where I could organise events, elaborate papers, discuss and share my ideas and enthusiasm with other people.

I have got a lot of nice memories from those days: the time spent with EC members and with

the ESIB director in Vienna, chairing the Board Meetings and discussions, meetings during these events, visits to other countries, etc. I find it quite difficult to say now, which of them was specifically special. I am just happy that I had the chance to chair ESIB for a year and therefore contributed to its history.

Was gender equality work an issue in ESIB/ESU back then and how was it debated? Did ESIB/ESU use gender quotas?

Gender equality was always an issue in ESIB and we emphasised on every occasion how important it is to enable equal access to higher education for all groups within society. At that time it was the Women's Committee, which was very active in organising conferences, debates as well as ad hoc actions concerning gender equality.

Why do you think is it, that all the female chairpersons from ESIB/ESU came from Central/Eastern Europe?

Is it really so? That sounds wonderful. Well, I think that it is great that female chairpersons of Central/Eastern Europe origin can contribute to ESIB/ESU and show that we are strong, reliable and trustworthy. As I understand the male chairpersons come from other part of Europe and in this way ESIB/ESU just proves that it deeply believes in and proclaims gender equality.

What do you wish ESIB/ESU for its birthday and the next 30 years and do you have any tips for future chairpersons?

I want to wish ESIB/ESU a very happy birthday and all the best for the future. Just a short note for the future chairperson: just be yourself, work hard and enjoy the time being a student. ●●

MARTINA VUKASOVIC

ESIB/ESU chair from January to December 2002

Country/NUS: Student Union of Yugoslavia/Student Union of Serbia (SUJU/SUS)

Positions on the national level: International Officer of SUS 2000; Educational Officer of SUS 2001–02;

Positions in ESU: Member of the Executive Committee 2001; Chairperson 2002; Member of the SDC 2003–05;

Subject studied: BSc in Astrophysics from the University in Belgrade and a MPhil in European Higher Education from the University in Oslo;

You became ESIB/ESU chair in 2002 just a short time after the democratic revolution in Yugoslavia. What did it mean for you taking the leadership of a European organisation at that point in time?

My decision to run for chair in 2002 was primarily motivated by internal organisational reasons, I learned a lot about how ESIB was working internally during my mandate in the EC in 2001 and so I thought I might be able to do a good job as chair in 2002.

I would not agree that 2000 was a democratic revolution but it was a new beginning, and the field was open for new actors, and SUS managed to position itself very well. The changes in Serbia were in some way a secondary motivation for me when I ran for chair, but they were not unimportant. I think both SUJU/SUS membership in ESIB, as well as my membership in the elected representatives, helped to promote student participation in higher education governance in Serbia more strongly and also helped SUS become more professional and more policy focused.

Your home NUS, sus, was actively involved in the progressive movement in Yugoslavia and one could say you were used to fight against resistance from your environment. Did that help you during your mandate and did you also have the feeling in ESIB/ESU that you have to overcome certain resistance within the organisation?

I cannot say that I encountered a lot of resistance from within ESIB/ESU although there were of course challenges in terms of coordinating different committees as well as disagreements with member unions about certain decisions.

Nevena Vuksanovic (Executive Committee)

@NevVuksanovic

Better education for a better society, cooperation instead of consumerism, inclusiveness instead of discrimination! #ESU30years

I was told by one other female ESIB/ESU chair long after my mandate ended that one of the BMs during my mandate (Turku 2002) was apparently the first BM where all of the motions the EC put forward were adopted. I have to say I was a bit surprised at that, since I did not notice this was the case, but I do remember there were several hard issues that we had to push for in the Board and some strong words flew towards the EC from some member unions, with the vote going to the EC side at the end.

How did you experience the work with the environment (i.e. other stakeholder-organisations), were your gender or your regional background ever a topic/hindrance?

I think it actually worked to our advantage, on both grounds. On the one hand side, I think that my regional background was not ever presented as a problem since there was an understanding that ESIB can elect whomever they want as chair and this should be respected, which also testifies to the reputation of ESIB as an organisation and

the overall political culture of other stakeholders. On the other hand, given that at that time Serbia was »the new favourite kid in the international family« and everyone was (too) hopeful about its future, having a chair from Serbia I felt was received as »kind of cool« and a testimony to openness and democratic character of ESIB.

Finally, I felt that some of my not extremely diplomatic statements were accepted also because people might have felt that it was OK for a »new favourite kid« not to behave always according to the strict diplomatic rules. I remember one instance where a chair of one stakeholder organisation expressed in a meeting where other stakeholders were also present, explicit dissatisfaction about ESIB signing a joint statement with EUA and not also including them. This was presented as not respecting the spirit of cooperation and not being grateful for the chance ESIB received to participate, to which I replied »the fact that we are doing this together does not mean we do not have to do everything in threesomes«. I might not dare to say something like that now, and I guess part of that has to do perhaps with being 10 years older.

Was gender equality work an issue in ESIB/ESU back then and how was it debated? Did ESIB/ESU use gender quotas?

There was not a gender quota but it was resurfacing as an issue from time to time. We did have an equality working group at that time but the working groups in general were a bit less active since a lot of work (and visibility) was related to the expert committees and at some point I think the internal Strategic Development Committee also addressed some equality issues. However, at that time, the focus was more on a broader concept of equality and not so much on gender. Nevertheless, I do know that before my time (late 90s) gen-

der equality was one of the big issues. It seems that this focus comes and goes like a pendulum.

Why do you think is it, that all the female chairpersons from ESIB/ESU came from Central/Eastern Europe?

I guess 5 out of 15 chairs being both female and from CEE/SEE cannot be called a mere coincidence and could be more than an interesting correlation. However, I am less sure about the underlying causal mechanism. SUS had quite a number of strong women in my days and when I discussed the fact that there were also strong women from CEE/SEE in ESIB as well, someone told me this was a Communist legacy, i.e. that the Communism did wonders to gender equality in CEE/SEE (in terms of political participation).

Perhaps other elements are the NUSes from which all of us came. I know that in at least some of the countries the NUSes from which the chairs came were the ones that had to fight for their recognition in the system, i.e. their status in the policy arena was not a given. Women were rather prominent in these organisations so I guess one learns to fight the odds and transfers that to the work in ESIB. A more cynical perspective, which might hold some water, could be that these women did not have more interesting opportunities on the national or institutional level (which is, in my opinion more male dominated, not completely, but still there is an imbalance), so they opted for the European level. A bit more cynical perspec-

ive, which would be interesting to explore, is that the North and West European unions are talking the talk while CEE/SEE unions are walking the walk. In other words the CEE/SEE might not have gender equality always as high on their agendas but they are practicing it by putting forward female candidates for chairs and perhaps also voting for female candidates. Bluntly, this would be the hypocrisy of the North/West argument.

What do you wish ESIB/ESU for its birthday and the next 30 years and do you have any tips for future chairpersons?

I wish ESU:

- ◊ to continue with the excellent job of being the largest exporter of individuals to other European organisations and national structures and thus continue contributing to better higher education policy on European and national levels (anyone said mafia?);
- ◊ to remain a strong competent stakeholder in the European policy arena and not miss any opportunity to put other stakeholders to shame when they deserve it for lack of preparation;
- ◊ to remain the »space« where lifelong friendships are made, even across generations;
- ◊ to become a favourite case to political scientists interested in complete reconciliation of competing grass-root, national and European interests in higher education.



VANJA IVOŠEVIĆ

ESIB/ESU chair from January to December 2005

Country/NUS: Croatia, csu

Positions on the national level: International Officer of csu 2001–02;

Positions in ESU: Member of the Executive Committee 2003–04; Chairperson 2005;

Subject studied: MA in Political Science at the University of Zagreb;

Was gender equality work an issue in ESIB/ESU back then and how was it debated? Did ESIB/ESU use gender quotas?

For most of my mandate it seemed as if gender equality was not an issue in ESIB/ESU. Through most of 2005 the issue was discussed neither in the hacks nor in the Board. However, suddenly to a great surprise of the EC, hacks and the Board in the autumn Board meeting of 2005 there was a proposal to form a Gender Equality Committee (GEC) by a number of unions.

The proposal came in the midst of debates on the organisational change of proposing a new Secretariat structure with a change to the position of the Secretary General and creating a paid position for the Chair and more importantly the discussion on the relations between the EC and the content committees. I didn't see it coming, the EC didn't, the hacks didn't and neither did the Board. It proved to be THE major debate of that Board meeting, much more than the discussion on moving the Chair to Brussels, firing one BPC member and raising membership fees. And it was a genuine debate as no one was prepared ahead and representatives and hacks have debated from unprepared positions and some, including the EC, changed their original positions once the debate started.

At first the EC, supported by a number of unions and hacks, thought that adding a new committee to the structure would hinder the work of the hacks, particularly in the light of the debates on the role of content committees and the EC which was central in 2005 and was expected to continue to be. However, the debate on the gender committee were so shocking in its content and in what some of the representatives were saying that it truly was a discussion on gender equality rather than on a committee. It was impossible then not to engage in the debate and soon the EC and the unions were arguing on content rather than structure. At that point I think many realised that maybe there is much to be discussed about gender equality in ESIB of which we were not even aware of.

Did you witness different blocs in ESIB/ESU when it comes to gender issues and how would you define them?

Yes. When the GEC discussion came up it was evident that East European and Mediterranean unions were against GEC, while the left wing unions put the proposal forward. However, there were a number of unions who were neutral at the beginning and who wanted to approach the discussion from a structural rather than gender equality perspective. However, the arguments put forward by some of the East European and Mediterranean unions were so openly sexist that the left wing unions who came with the proposal were in the end supported by the majority of West European and Nordic unions, as well as the EC. It was just so shocking to hear some of the arguments along the line of »women are naturally less inclined to politics« that one simply could not say »well, we may not need GEC for it will cause structural issues.«

The funny thing is that, if the East European and Mediterranean unions didn't engage in the discussion the way some of them did, the proposal would have not passed. It would have been a discussion on whether we need another committee in what was already seen as a partially dysfunctional structure and the neutral unions would most probably have, on those grounds, voted against the proposal.

Did these blocs influence your work and if so how?

I think the blocs always influenced the work of the hacks and the Board. Within the hacks you had to know which hack came from which bloc as this meant influence over their votes. Within the Board you had to know which union representatives lead the bloc to know who will influence their votes.

However, I think what is important to know is that the blocs are not static, both in terms of which unions compose a bloc and in terms of who leads the bloc. I think that can change quite significantly over time.

A particularly interesting dynamic is the cooperation between the blocs. For instance the South East European (SEE) bloc used to be very close to the Nordic (NOM) bloc and they cooperated intensely in the Board and as hacks—even to the extent of having a SEE-NOM meeting in 2004 in Ljubljana. At the same time the SEE bloc was not very close to the Med-Net bloc, while later that changed significantly.

You followed ESIB/ESU also after the end of your mandate. From the distance of an alumnus would you say gender equality improved or not?

I think in the end it proved important to have a GEC and to work on gender equality explicitly, particularly in making the issue visible to unions and exposing the different views on the subject. I think it was extremely positive to have two women run against each other for Chair and I think it is quite a historical event

to have a female candidate win elections against a male candidate for Chair as it never happened before. Although I am guessing that if we had another debate on GEC today not much would have

changed from 2005. I think the next step is to include gender issues into policies more consistently and I haven't seen much of that in ESU.

Why do you think is it, that all the female chairpersons from ESIB/ESU came from Central/Eastern Europe?

First I don't think it's a coincidence, but I am not entirely sure why that is. My theory is that in Central/Eastern Europe you grow up with a strong belief that women are indeed equal and that women do work and have a career—a legacy of communism—you discover quite late if anytime that this is not entirely true. On top of that to go through the national union to a higher up position you already had to deal with sexism and machismo, consciously so or not,—so the ESU board is a friendlier place by then.

Liliya Ivanova (Executive Committee)

As a voice of the European students in the years to come ESU needs to ensure the continuity of its mission - to strive for a stronger student movement, shaping a broader concept of what Europe is – a common space united through knowledge, built in a student-centered learning system #ESU30years

What do you wish ESIB/ESU for its birthday and the next 30 years and do you have any tips for future chairpersons?

I wish for ESU to have a strong membership across Europe and genuine, progressive and provocative policies full of new ideas for how higher education should look like. And in light of this theme I do wish that at least half of the Chairs are women from 2010 onwards.

For the future chairpersons: I'm guessing you will not run again, therefore you don't need to care about re-election which means you can care about taking a bold step forward for the organisation—structurally or content wise. So put forward an organisational change which will move the structural discussion forward or a policy that will take the higher education discussion into a new direction. ●●

LIGIA DECA

ESIB/ESU chair from July 2008 to June 2010
Country/NUS: Romania/ National Alliance of Student Organisations in Romania (ANSOR)
Positions on the national level: Secretary General of ANSOR 2005-2006; President of ANSOR 2006-07;
Positions in ESU: Member of the Gender Equality Committee 2008; Chairperson 2008-10;
Subject studied: BSc in Maritime Engineering and Navigation from Constanta Maritime University; MSc in Management from Constanta Maritime University;

You were a member of the Gender Equality Committee before running for chairperson. In your opinion was that helpful or a burden in the election?

I am extremely grateful for the six months spent in the ESU Gender Equality Committee prior to starting my first mandate as ESU Chairperson. Firstly, it allowed me to get acquainted with the diversity of views on this issue in the ESU Board, as well as the very different national approaches related to gender equality. It was an eye-opener also in terms of how ESU representatives are meant to work for all ESU members, not just for the interest of their NUSes. Being an ESU hack and being involved in various other projects, such as the EQF project and the ›Let's Go!‹ mobility campaign also helped me grow as a student representative and prepared me for the work ahead.

In the election process, I think my experience as a member of GEC was actually an advantage. It helped me to relate much better to NUSes with which I worked previously and even though the way to achieve gender equality is still highly debated in ESU, the principle itself is held dear by all

NUSes, so I believe it worked as an overall plus in the election process.

You were the first chairperson serving the organisation for two mandates. How was the re-election compared to your initial election and was the second mandate easier or harder for you?

In my experience, every mandate is different. It was not an easy decision to run for a second mandate and it involved a lot of personal reflection. Firstly, from the first to the second mandate, I had to learn to prioritise and to protect myself and my team members from burnout. Secondly, you learn to set objectives in a more realistic manner and realise that your work will be continued by your successors, which might see things differently.

In my experience, in the second mandate you also lose the temptation to focus on ESU's external political image and you try to 'fix' internal issues and ensure sustainability, both structurally and financially. In my first mandate, I had to continuously prove myself, as I was widely considered as inexperienced by ESU alumni; and they were right. I had to work very hard to catch up on some areas, but I also benefited from their constructively critical support. In my second mandate, I felt more confident and so I could reflect more on what I thought was the road ahead for ESU and its role for the students it represents.

When it comes to the election for my second mandate, it was not easier or harder. It was very different, as I was defending a vision set by an EC which I had the pleasure to chair and my ability to continue in a better way, compared to the initial election campaign, which was much more focused on changing things, proving that the new structures work and uniting the organisation after some stormy BMs.

Do you think gender equality issues have enough or too much room in ESU's debates and Board Meetings?

I think there were times in which the gender equality debate was artificially divisive and maybe too focused on which tools are best for ESU, rather than on the issues that each NUS has with this topic in the national or internal contexts. ESU took a number of measures for being more gender equal internally, but they were rarely evaluated, which only increased the scepticism of the NUSes which opposed them initially. That being said, I learned a lot from BM female sessions and I am all for continuing them and enhancing their concept to suit the needs of the new generations of female student representatives.

I personally felt the need for ESU to work on this issue in a way that helps both NUSes to become more gender equal through gender mainstreaming strategies, but also on topics which are not necessarily central to the HE policy agenda, such as pay gaps, domestic violence or violence against women or reproductive health, as part of the progressive role that the student movement should have.

Did you experience situations in your time as chairperson, where you felt that you were discriminated based on your gender or regional background?

I felt more discriminated based on my regional background than on my gender. I think there are some regional stereotypes which were relatively difficult to fight regardless of the official talk of equality, democracy and tolerance in BMs. Behind closed doors, you still need to convince that you don't fit the 'bloc' profile if you are to gather wide support for your work or your proposals.



However, the fact that I did not feel discriminated based on my gender was something different than my experience in my local student union in Constanta for example, so I guess it is something I need to thank the work undertaken in ESU on gender equality.

Why do you think is it, that all the female chairpersons from ESIB/ESU came from Central/Eastern Europe?

I knew this question would pop-up eventually. And I don't believe in coincidences, so I guess I need to come up with some sort of an explanation.

Blazhe Todorovski (Executive Committee)

@BTodorovski

Seeing ESU as a major students' power in Europe, representing at least 20 million students in Europe and not questioning the policies on European level but creating them #ESU30years

rational that the student movement is more progressive in this sense and that female student representatives broke the glass ceiling by having the drive to take over leadership positions and being ready, willing and able to fight for them in

I think that the political environment in Central and Eastern Europe was and still is not very conducive to the promotion of female leaders. It's only natural

that the student movement is more progressive in this sense and that female student representatives broke the glass ceiling by having the drive to take over leadership positions and being ready, willing and able to fight for them in ESU's democratic arena. Plus, I really believe women have easier access to that extra empathy that makes it easier for them to understand other views and balance the very diverse NUS interests. I know, it sounds like a gender stereotype, but I think at least at the level of perception, it can be a possible explanation.

What do you wish ESIB/ESU for its birthday and the next 30 years and do you have any tips for future chairpersons?

I am also turning 30 this year and so I think I can feel some of ESU's dilemmas. I wish that ESU finds that secret ingredient that helps the organisation maintain its revolutionary potential, while also being institutionalised enough to help its members and make a political difference in the European HE context. I also wish that it remains attractive to exceptional student representatives and that it continues to be progressive and to build bridges between students, organisations and representation cultures. And for its birthday, I wish that the passion of all those gathering in Cyprus to celebrate 30 years of the European student movement motivates those meant to take it forward. Happy birthday! ●●

KARINA UFERT

ESIB/ESU chair since July 2012 (mandate until June 2013)

Country/NUS: Lithuania—LSS

Positions on the national level: Vice-president of LSS 2009–10

Positions in ESU: Member of Executive Committee 2010; Vice-Chairperson 2011; Chairperson 2012;

Subject studied: BA in Social Work and Counseling and MA in Social Work and Social Policy from Vilnius University

You are the most recent female chairperson of ESU; do you feel more connected to your female predecessors than to then male ones?

I think I am naturally connected to those, with whom I can have a good discussion, those who are open to listen and understand. It is true, statistically it happened to be mostly my female predecessors. All of them are extraordinarily strong women that I respect. However, in terms of transferring know-how in ESU, I do have a habit of learning by doing, therefore not always keen on asking for advice.

In your election, for both the vice-chair as well as the chairperson of ESU, you had to run against men. Was the gender question present in the campaigning and did you or the others introduce it to the debates?

Unfortunately, certain errors of judgment and choice, based on biases of intuition (gender biases) do happen to influence the Board dynamics. Yes, there were people claiming, that I have no competence to deal with finances or projects or be harsh to people I work with. During the vice-chair elections, I had copies of my previous certifications in a suitcase, as I used to work in sever-

al consultancies on EU-funded projects, including structural funds—just in case someone dared to raise it up to my face, not behind my back.

For the chair elections, I assume I gained more wisdom. If people want to build an argument against you, they will find out how. If it wouldn't be one's gender, it can always be ethnic origin, disability or any other feature. As M. Thatcher said, I always cheer up immensely if an attack is particularly wounding because I think well, if they attack one personally, it means they have not a single political argument left. I found a proper debate missing in my elections, but hopefully we have a full year ahead, especially when ESU is about to define its strategic priorities.

In your experience, would you say ESU is a gender equal organisation or is it just a political façade?

ESU is people first of all; coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and turnover is rather high. This is why it is difficult to achieve a long-lasting impact, despite some good initiatives, like the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy.

What is your vision for the future of ESU concerning issues like gender equality or regional background of elected representatives, NUS delegates etc.?

Limiting the damage, that errors in judgment and biases can cause, by creating more opportunities to get to know each other. It comes along improving ability to identify and understand errors of judgment and choice in others and eventually in oneself, by providing a more precise language to discuss them. So it is all about education and speaking about gender—bringing to attention the unique qualities and traits of both genders with regard to leadership style, problem-solving abilities etc. Another important thing to my mind,



I have known ESU when it was still ESIB, in the very early days of what was to become the »Bologna process«. When I designed proposals for this profound and coordinated movement of change, reform and convergence in European higher education, it was extremely clear in my mind that the main reason for doing so was to better serve students, as individuals and citizens able to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Europe, its countries and regions.

This was not only because such a vision was indispensable for the Bologna Process to work, but also because I myself went through the atypical itinerary of a student with initial cultural, social and economic difficulties and European/international aspirations. ESIB/ESU has played a key role in the later shaping of the »social dimension« of the European Higher Education Area. I may on occasions have a more demanding, »merit-based« vision of what this social dimension ought to be if it is to be sustainable, but I have always found that ESU's contributions to policy-making, dissemination activities and concrete quality assurance procedures were particularly convincing; I would therefore like to encourage the leadership and membership of ESU and its member associations to keep as committed, determined and effective as over the past decade.

Guy Haug, co-designer of ERASMUS, TEMPUS, the Bologna process and the Agenda for the Modernisation of European Higher education

is to focus ESU towards one vision for education as well as for societies.

Why do you think it is, that all the female chairpersons from ESIB/ESU came from Central/Eastern Europe?

Because they (also me) have been running for the position and they got enough support to get elected—simple as that. Why (we) were running—I can only speak for myself. I saw a need to put my prior experience in the organisation and my know-how into improving certain impairments, which hinder ESU's capacity to act as a strong lobby organisation. Why unions from the other regions were not putting forward a female candidate—I would ask the unions.

Why I got elected—you better ask the Board, but probably those ideas were appealing to the majority. Why my Eastern European background can be of importance here, is probably because it helps to acquire certain important competences to do the job: keep calm and organise, deal with limited resources in a great variety of democracies; just like ESU.

Do you have any tips for future chairpersons?

As for the tip, it is not enough to have an outstanding vision for the organisation, it is important to have an ability to share it with other people; listen to what they have to say, plan your work and then work your plan. Just do not forget to enjoy every day—if not, then it is a bad deal. ●●

THE MAFIA

by Martina Vukasovic, Chairperson of ESIB, 2002.

If one googles (what a wonderful verb!) »mafia«, most of the prioritised links, depending somewhat on prior searches, are either news items related to organised crime trials and arrests or links to Wikipedia articles on the Sicilian or Russian mafia, or concerning some party or a computer game. If one mentions »the mafia« in the European higher education (EHE) circles, it is highly likely that the more experienced members of these circles will immediately think of ESU and its alumni. In this article, I will try to demystify the ESU Mafia by shedding some light on what does it do and how big it is, how one becomes a member of the ESU Mafia and how the members recognise each other; and finally I will address the dangers as well as the benefits of being a member of this Mafia.

WHAT DOES THE MAFIA DO AND HOW BIG IS IT?

Unlike the Cosa Nostra, the ESU Mafia is not involved in racketeering of different players in the European higher education. Truth be told however, the ESU Mafia is rather well infiltrated. Apart

from the fact that no major move in the EHE community can hardly be made without the elected ESU representatives (A stage which can be considered as the initiation into the Mafia, see below.) giving their nod of approval, the Mafia has ways of influencing the major players as well through its (more or less) covert agents.

Although it could be argued that other major players are trying to influence ESU as well—by connecting it to other players or supporting some of the ESU operations—informed sources claim that that the network of ESU Mafia is actually the best developed. Furthermore, there are also indications that the breadth and depth of ESU influence on other EHE players (in terms of their preferences, structures and ways of operations) are significant enough to soon be focus of extensive scientific research.

ESU agents have so far infiltrated all major European players, managing to rise high up the ranks of these organisations, including being in the leadership positions of several key players. This is even more interesting when knowing that the EHE community willingly and knowingly selected some of ESU's agents to these leadership positions. Furthermore, given the importance of

the interplay between European and national level of activities related to higher education, the national structures have also been rather well infiltrated as the ESU Mafia has agents in ministries responsible for higher education in many European countries, again, quite high up the ranks in some of them.

Why are ESU representatives so professional and so influential? I believe this has to do with their »long march through the institutions«. EU and national officials are nominated by their administrations. ESU delegates have won elections at local, national and European level. They survived heated debates at their universities. They made it to the ESU board. Not much can surprise them anymore. They act like elderly statesmen/-women, mediating in disputes between other, more senior, stakeholders. Many continue their march and become officials or researchers themselves. This allows these bright young professionals to take some distance from all too fixed previous positions. I enjoyed working with my ESU friends tremendously and I wish them and their association every possible success.

Peter van der Hijden, European Commission official, worked with ESU during his Bologna years 2001–08. He now works at DG Research and Innovation.

These two streams of infiltrations together led one of the major players in European higher education to claim that »(the intergovernmental) Bologna Follow-Up Group meetings are starting to resemble a regular ESU alumni get-together«. Finally, a number of the Mafia also made its way to the community of researchers' and policy analysts', while from time to time working for different players in the EHE community by providing the knowledge base for their policy. Though they are not always involved in the core activities

of the EHE community, their influence should not be considered negligible. After all, what better way to influence these players then to tap into one of their most precious resources—information and knowledge?

BECOMING A MEMBER AND RECOGNISING OTHER MEMBERS

As was indicated earlier, to become a member of the ESU Mafia,

one first must go through the initiation stage. The initiation stage includes being active in ESU working structures, including attendance at and participation in the Board Meetings. During this stage, various characteristics of the prospective Mafia member are tested, including his/her motivation, basic beliefs concerning higher education and society in general, as well as stamina to engage in in-depth discussions of policies (some of which start at two o'clock in the morning after several sixteen-hour working days), even more in-depth discussions on procedures for adoption of said policies within ESU structures (procedures that can be rather confusing to a non-native and often amusing to the natives of the procedures), persuading other players in the EHE community (an essential activity of the Mafia), or building stronger bonds within the Mafia by ... well, partying. This stage is of crucial importance, given that



ESU's Executive Committee 2012–13



it also contributes to easier mutual recognition of Mafia members at a later stage.

Upon leaving the active duty within esu, what usually happens is a period of R&R (rest and recuperation), followed by a somewhat longer bout of nostalgia and sometimes also a mild identity crisis (see below). To overcome this, and in this way actually making a decision to become esu Mafia member, a person often finds themselves looking for different higher education related activities. (Some may see in this even some form of addiction to higher education policy issues.) In this process, other Mafia members are often quite helpful, leading also to concentration of esu Mafia members in structures of particular players or outside the core of EHE community doing PhDs on higher education. From this point on, the esu Mafia member is likely to stay closely connected to the EHE community, perhaps shifting from one player to the other, and therefore making the esu Mafia network even stronger.

esu Mafia members are often likely to know each other from their initiation stage or, given the overlapping of generations within esu, through common connections within the esu Mafia. They are also likely to recognise each other as esu Mafia members by the similarity of their reactions to positions of other players, the immediate raising of hand to voice a strong objection to the idea of tuition fees being the best tell-tale sign.

However, in cases where their initiation stages covered different periods of time (after all, if esu is already 30, imagine how old some Mafia members are!) or there was no opportunity to recognise each other on the basis of policy preferences, other EHE players, the very ones who have been infiltrated by the esu Mafia in the first place, are likely to introduce the esu Mafia members to each other.

DANGERS AND BENEFITS OF BEING A MEMBER OF THE MAFIA

Membership in the esu Mafia, while arguably being less life-threatening than membership in the Cosa Nostra, is not without its dangers. Of course, the primary danger is related to the possibility of ever getting out of the Mafia. This is first and foremost made difficult by the already indicated addiction of the Mafia members to higher education policy issues in particular, or policy-making and politics in general.

Secondly, the increasing political and economic importance of higher education makes those belonging to the esu Mafia attractive for other EHE players on the European and national level. So if a Mafia member would think at some point of changing focus and setting student representation and higher education policy aside, they are

likely to get approached by other EHE players with offers for often very interesting work (which is not to be taken lightly in this crisis economy).

Thirdly, the very size (and spread) of the ESU Mafia network combined with the previous factor—the increasing importance of higher education and therefore the more frequent and numerous discussions, projects and conferences on higher education—as well as the impossibility to effectively hide in the age of social media and online networking, limits the possibility of leaving the scene. Even if one strays away for a short period of time, they are likely to stumble upon or be discovered by an ESU Mafia member rather soon.

Excellent indicators of how difficult it is to leave (or how easy it is to fall off the wagon) are the number of alumni following ESU online (including the online Bored Mail—an ironic take on the actual Board Meeting), the number of those coming to celebrate ESU's 30th birthday (and the distances they are willing to cover and the amounts willing to pay for travel for a short weekend) and even more so the number of those wishing they could come to the celebration but who have been

prevented from joining in person by obligations at home or at work (though they are joining by virtual means).

Another danger connected to the membership in the ESU Mafia is related to identity. Apart from their ESU identity, each Mafia member over time develops a set of other identities, some related to their private life (in particular after becoming parents) and some related to their professional life. Those Mafia members that stay in the core of the EHE community or embark on research careers are likely to be faced with the necessity to step out (a bit) out of their student representative shoes and try to see the world from different/multiple perspectives.

In some cases this may take them more or less »to the other side«—into the shoes of representatives of universities, governments, employers or as academic staff themselves (struggling with dividing their time between teaching and research). This may lead to a period of self-questioning and even self-doubt, in which one's core beliefs are tested and re-evaluated. During this phase, an ESU Mafia member can be somewhat vulnerable, a

Based on my experience of collaboration with ESIB and now ESU since 1998, the organisation has played a key role in the very significant developments in European Higher Education over the last 14 years. It was a key player in terms of assisting students' unions in many European countries in their internal capacity building and development work, thus contributing to national HE reform processes, including in some countries the embedding of democratic principles following major political changes, and in improvements in the student experience for many millions of students.

This capacity building work with national students' unions also involved bringing these unions more closely into the emerging European

Higher Education Area, in which ESIB and now ESU has itself been a major player, ever since it insisted on attending the initial Bologna Conference in 1999 and helped redraft the 2001 Prague Communiqué to ensure that the role of students was fully recognised in the Process.

It is vital that national students unions operate not just at national level, but are also well informed of developments at European level, and can contribute to these from their specific perspectives, while at the same time making links across national borders to students in other countries and from different traditions. ESIB and ESU have provided this service to their members, a service which has been of enormous benefit not just to student organisations generally, but also to the overall development of European higher education policies and practices.

At a more micro but equally important level, the ESU network has been crucial to the successful identification of students and young professionals with experience and expertise in HE matters at more than just national level, who can contribute from a student perspective to many practical aspects of the Bologna process and other European developments. The voice of students is in this way now an accepted and regular feature, at both national and European levels, of quality assurance evaluation processes across Europe, in the monitoring of the Bologna Process and the implementation and use of various tools such as recognition, ECTS, national qualifications frameworks, the promotion of mobility and lifelong learning, etc.

And at an individual level, the ESU network has likewise provided a series of outstanding young professionals who are the emerging generation of European higher education researchers and leaders, whose vision, hard work and commitment will drive and sustain the emerging European Higher Education Area over the coming years beyond what we are capable of imagining today.

I congratulate ESU on thirty years of successful existence, and wish you every success for the next equally important thirty years!

Lewis Purser, Director of Academic Affairs, Irish Universities Association

state in which a compadre's comment on becoming »neoliberal« (the ultimate esu insult) can cut rather deep (which should also serve as a warning to fellow Mafia members not to use the »neoliberal« label lightly) (Similarity with real life esu Mafia members is purely coincidental ...). However,

skills. In particular importance here is the initiation stage, since being active in esu structures exposes one to a variety of situations, perspectives, processes and arguments. It provides the opportunity to be at the source of ENE policy development, meet the »big players« face to face (both

those who are seen as such by many and those who are seen as such by very few) and engage with them in political debates.

The initiation stage furthers the opportunity to form coalitions, plan and execute elaborate (and efficient!) lobbying strategies, and increase one's mental and physical stamina through rigorous training in debate, development of policy, organising big events, writing project applications and project reports that please even the toughest donor agency and ... well, partying. Though it is sometimes considered

to be a bad word by some of the esu Mafia, this mixture of knowledge, competence and skills makes esu Mafia members actually highly employable and, stretching the employability concept a bit, makes the esu Mafia members also very skilled in creating work and jobs for themselves, but also for fellow Mafia members.

Furthermore, as other mafias, the esu Mafia is a rather effective support network. It can pro-



the self-questioning period ends relatively quickly and in most cases actually leads to core beliefs being reinvigorated and reinforced, ultimately also benefiting esu itself given that this rediscovery of the self can provide additional support to esu's policies.

As for the benefits, they are numerous. Being in the esu Mafia enables one to acquire a rather potent mixture of knowledge, competence and

vide a stranded compadre with food, shelter and, more importantly, booze—the ultimate social lubricant. It can provide company for sharing the aforementioned food and booze, and naturally a lot of laughs in many places in Europe and beyond. It can provide unexpected holiday options including snow covered huts in the Norwegian countryside, small villages with good čevapi and crazy bus rides through the heart of the Balkans or opportunities to enjoy the sun (and the wind) on the sandy beaches of Portugal.

The Mafia network provides skilled sailing crews (and boats) and exotic holiday destinations (some Mafia members were or currently are based in interesting destinations such as Cambodia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Laos etc). Furthermore, the Mafia can provide easy access to partners (in crime) and given what was stated earlier about knowledge, skills and competence of Mafia members, such partnerships (focusing on higher education or not) are likely to be a huge success.

But perhaps ultimately, the Mafia provides numerous opportunities for deep and lasting friendships. What stronger bond than between those who sat together in the trenches fighting the introduction of tuition fees and advocating for student participation or lobbying both European and national players towards a particular formulation in a Bologna Process communiqué? (Play here the soundtrack from »Band of Brothers«.) The fact that some of these friendships turned into life-partnerships and marriages makes the Mafia bonds even stronger and transferable through time. It also strengthens the ϵ SU Mafia for the future, given that such combination of nature and nurture in the ϵ SU Mafia, an offspring may give rise to the »ultimate student representative«, one likely to be so knowledgeable and skilled and give some headache to the other ϵ HE players in the future. The funny side though (or perhaps quite a natural development) is that by then, these ϵ HE players are likely to be ϵ SU Mafia members themselves, wearing grey hair or no hair as a disguise. ●●

18th European
Student Convention

Stockholm 16 - 18 October 2009



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MEMORIES

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY IN ESU?

- What I've noticed and appreciated in ESU the most is that despite fights in meeting room, despite different (not wrong) opinions and ways of doing things at the end of the day still 47 NUS from 38 countries are having a common goal to make student life, so the future for everyone, better and are friends to be a great example of integration and cooperation, *Ieva Baltina*
- Bungalow number 5 (or eight I can't remember), *John C. Friend Perreira*
- When Justin in his goodbye speech told that some of us have become more than friends. Setting: Paris, around 4 am, cafeteria (after being kicked out of official BM venue), *Anita Lice*
- Meeting an alleged representative of a NUS during a study visit to re-assess the NUS's membership in ESU rather late at night in a shopping mall in Tuzla (BiH), while there is a snow storm outside, and afterwards driving back to Sarajevo through the night with an energetic Bosnian-Serbian NUS delegate as driver and a scared Finn as fellow-passenger, *Jens Junblut*
- Having a Sabbath dinner with the delegates from NUIS at the Board Meeting in Tel Aviv, *Jens Junblut*
- When we managed to make regional student unions from across the world to agree on students' input to UNESCO before the World Conference on Higher education in 2009, *Olav Øye*
- Oh, there will never be a better experience than the great adventure round Poland in a car not having a clue where you are in the middle of the night with sms coming in from Lazy asking whether we are alive, *Edgaras Gudavičius*

IF IT WASN'T FOR (W)ESIB/ESU, I WOULDN'T:

- ◉ be still involved in Education Policy and have friends around the world,
John C. Friend Pereira
- ◉ represent employers now, *Anita Lice*
- ◉ have a frequent flyer status with Lufthansa, friends in nearly all European countries and wouldn't be doing a PhD in Higher Education,
Jens Junblut
- ◉ have met my husband - Johan Almqvist, ESIB chair in 2004,
Lene Løge Almqvist (formerly Henriksen)
- ◉ be so convinced that the European Union actually has a chance of becoming a Habermasian democracy. If EU citizens would only accept that they have to communicate in English, *Olav Øye*
- ◉ have spent a week in a presidential residence in Bulgaria, where an SFS delegate played the grand piano on coffee breaks. I think this was in 2003, *Inka Leisma*
- ◉ taken a bus to the middle of the slovakian forest, would never have ended up discussing politics in english at 3 am in the lobby of a hotel in Bulgaria, quite drunk, would never have ridden a train from Madrid to Paris because I'd miss my plane, never smoked chicha in a Polish bar reopened just for us ...
Claire Guichet
- ◉ have been working on my PhD on change in universities and would not have friends in many cities around Europe (and the world) that I can have a beer with or crash for the night, *Martina Vukasovic*
- ◉ have friends to call on the other side of Europe to keep me company for 40 minutes, while I am floating at 2 knots from one island to another on my sailing holiday,
Juuso Leivonen
- ◉ have learnt what ESIB/ESU people can do with their bodies to win a PSPR t-shirt, I would never have learnt that cabbage is this element of Polish cuisine the ESU guests could be really fed up with (frankly I expected beforehand that potatoes can be a bigger problem), and I would never have learnt that standards of student conference can allow for offering the participants while arrival just half of a bed, I would never had this strange feeling while singing »Come on baby, light my fire« just after whole Study Visit team almost died in fire ... there are much more such memories;) *Bartek Banaszak*
- ◉ know how the wrecked bungalow looks like ... and how naturally and unnoticed it can happen by being just ESIBian :D And actually story was on true solidarity ... 2001 BM in Casta Papiernicka,
Dita Erna Sile

- have called a Finnish radio station from a middle of nowhere in Slovakia to learn who won the Eurovision Song Contest that particular year, *Marija Mitro-Milić*
- have changed my studies from engineering to political science, I wouldn't think that traveling to any country without not having a particular plan was a great idea, I wouldn't be able to go to almost any capital in Europe and be able to call someone on the spot and see if I can stay with them, I wouldn't have learned that friendship is not about how much you see each other but rather about when you do see each other what you discuss, I wouldn't have lived for two years in Belgrade, and I think a lot of things I will still do is because of ESIB,
Vanja Ivosevic
- my parents would have not hosted numbers of ESIBians each month between 2003–05, at times 8 at the same time half of which would sleep in the living room and on regular yearly basis (until I moved out) and my father would have not learned all the shortcuts to the airport with a number of the guests he had to rush to the airport early in the morning. :-)
Vanja Ivosevic
- have slept in five different countries on five consecutive nights, from Skelleftea in the North down to Porto Santo in the South
Alex Bols

- have spent time in the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska or vice-chaired a BM in the early hours of the morning in a student canteen in a Parisian suburb Bercy (the name of which in Finnish refers to one's bottom)
Inka Leisma



- have walked for 6 hours and (almost) 40kms with James, Chris and Bojan to get from Myslenice to Warsaw to join others, who btw. forgot us at the venue, in time for the fancy dinner,
Marija Mitro-Milić

- ◉ have participated in a pijama party that started in van gogh hostel in brussels and ended somewhere in an muslim café during the Socrates on the move training,
Paulo Fontes
- ◉ have deviated the route of a commercial flight so participants of BM45 could land in Porto Santo, *Paulo Fontes*
- ◉ have seen the piano concert by Paris Constantinou somewhere in Slovakia,
Paulo Fontes
- ◉ have taken a train accross the bridge from Malmö/Sweden to Copenhagen/Denmark (with Anna and Ignacio from SFS) for an hour just to buy 15 liters of wine and three liters of spirits because it was 6th January and Systembolaget was closed, and the ESIB handover group had run out of alcohol,
Terhi Nokkala
- ◉ have spent 16 hours in travelling to Porto Santo wearing full gala evening gear (minus the actual ball dress) because having to leave in the middle of a gala evening in Turku to make it there in time to be with all those awesome ESIBians (and to drink cheap Madeira till dawn ...)
Susanna Kärki
- ◉ have had revelations concerning equity and equality and learned the difference between the two; I wouldn't have learned what a caffeine high is (cause I don't drink coffee); I wouldn't have found parties so intellectually challenging (the best debates happen after a couple of beers); I wouldn't have lost my identity card, passport and my luggage on the same flight; I wouldn't have learned the art of light packing and multifunctional wardrobe and if it weren't for ESU I wouldn't have ›accidentally‹ send to the hacks a draft policy paper with ESU's new mission namely that »ESU should try and take over the world« (see Pinky and the Brain for more details),
Melinda Szabo