THE EUROPEAN STUDENTS’ UNION

The European Students’ Union (esu) is an umbrella organisation of 47 National Unions of Students (nus) from 39 countries (December 2013). The aim of esu is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Through its members, esu represents over 11 million students in Europe.

Until 2015, esu will mainly focus on four priority areas as adopted at the organisation’s 63rd Board Meeting held in Malta.

ACCESS AND SUPPORT
esu will work with the social dimension, aspiring towards widening access for underrepresented groups to higher education and promote the benefits of extensive and accessible student support systems.

EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY
esu will strengthen the notion of higher education as a public responsibility and reduce commodification of the system in alliance with the educational policy community.

QUALITY AND TRANSPARENCY
Students will be empowered to improve quality provisions for higher education and increased focus will be placed on student centred learning. Transparency tools will be aligned with students’ needs for information.

MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION
Sustainable funding, quality and accessibility must be ensured for European mobility programs. esu will strengthen its involvement in Global Students’ Cooperation, focusing on quality in and access to higher education and empowerment of students.

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Dear readers,

It is not an easy task to summarise all the work that the European Students’ Union does—since it became a very complex organisation included in a vast number of policy processes and projects, much different from when it was founded in 1982. The European Students’ Union works on a wide range of issues, including but not limited to the social dimension, quality and quality assurance, public responsibility and mobility and internationalisation of higher education. However, this booklet is an attempt to summarise this work with a hope that you will get a glimpse at who we are and what we stand for.

I would say that we have had a good year. It was mostly a year of preparation, as the only really big process that finished in 2013 was a negotiation round on a long-term EU budget, which the new Erasmus+ programme was a part of. Student representatives have been actively advocating for member states to increase the funding for the Erasmus programme. The final agreed budget, dedicated to higher education, was close to our wishes. We did not agree with all the parts of the programme, but it was a step forward and we are glad that the EU is putting more emphasis on education and research. That is the real solution out of the current economic crisis (much rather than the austerity measures that have so far been implemented).

ESU continues to be an active player in the Bologna process. Being the only student representatives, we have an ever bigger obligation to steer the reforms in the correct way. We have tried to increase our participation also in other forums, such as in the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Educational Policy and Practices, as national countries as more and more looking to the European level for advice and good practices for policies, and it is crucial that the students’ voice is heard properly in all forums.

While we were a part of several projects in different areas in this year, we have finalised two major projects that have added to the research on higher education at the European level. The FinSt project—Financing the Students’ Future—outlined that while higher education funding systems across Europe vary greatly, which makes it difficult to compare them, most countries are turning in a wrong direction making students’ conditions worse. Cost-sharing, which is a nice word used to put more financial burdens on students and their families, is increasing in a majority of countries in Europe. The notion to have to pay for your education has become a rule rather than an exception.

The quest project—Quest for Quality for Students—examined how students visualise quality education. While ESU has been active in discussions on quality assurance in Europe for a number of years, as a member of the co-called E4 group and wider, this was the first time that we carried out a large scale research on what students think about quality. It was not surprising to see that students value the academic aspects of quality, from proper curriculum to assessment, but they also emphasise that quality education needs to address other dimensions, such as accessibility of higher education, student support services, student-centred learning etc.

In the end, I would say that ESU remains the biggest and most active student organisation at the European level. It is not easy to coordinate the voices of more than 11 million students, represented by its 47 member unions from 39 different European countries, it is most definitely needed. Students must unite and stand up for their rights. History has taught us that it is the only way to make a step forward. In the present economic climate, it is even more necessary.

Rok Primozic,
Chairperson of the European Students’ Union 2013–14
ESU’S POLICY WORK AND PARTNERSHIPS

Representing the interests of 47 national unions of students in Europe, with a geographical area that spans from Portugal in the west to Azerbaijan in the east, the European Students’ Union (ESU) continued its work on core priority areas such as the funding of higher education, mobility and internationalisation, quality and transparency.

In 2013, ESU’s interest remained centred on the developments of the ongoing Bologna process and the ET2020 and the EU2020 agendas.

BOLOGNA PROCESS

In 2012, the Bologna Follow-Up Group agreed that ESU should co-chair one of its four working groups along with Ireland, namely the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning Working Group.

ESU, together with its Irish co-chair Brian Power, hope to reach the outcomes of this working group before the end of its mandate, such as supporting the development of national access plans to higher education, set up targets for underrepresented groups and monitor their achievements.

The third meeting of this working group was held in Ghent, Belgium, and focused on issues related to learning and teaching, where ESU was invited to present its input on the future of teaching and learning by highlighting student-centred learning as an integral element in higher education.

In addition, ESU follows closely other working fields of the Bologna process, one of them concerning the revision of the ECTS Guide, for the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. This revision process looked in particular at the ECTS system, and how it could take into account developments in higher education since it was last updated in 2009. Representatives of fourteen countries were invited to this work in addition to four association in higher education, including ESU.

ESU also participated in a steering group on the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in partnership with the so-called E4 group, consisting of the associations EURASHE, EUA and ENQA, in addition to ESU.

“The steering group carried out substantial work in 2013 and reached an agreement on the context, scope and principles of the framework.”

The steering group carried out substantial work in 2013 and reached an agreement on the context, scope, purpose and principles of the framework. Further work on finalising the proposal is planned with the aim of presenting the final version in the beginning of 2014. This proposal will serve as an input to discussions taking place at the Bologna Follow-Up Group and an input to the upcoming ministerial meeting of the Bologna process in 2015.

EUROPEAN UNION

ESU monitors actively and contributes to policy making processes of the European Union that may affect students and their rights. It furthermore provides its member unions with advices and support in discussions taking place at the European level.

In 2013, ESU followed closely discussions on the Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education in Europe, where ESU supported the core idea of improving access to quality education for all people. ESU also contributed to other policy developments under review at the European Commission, such as the automatic recognition of degrees, the drafting of the ECTS guidelines and discussions on the future of the Bologna process.

ESU also contributed actively to negotiations on a new seven year framework programme for education and youth, called Erasmus+.
While welcoming a significant increase in funds for the programme, compared to the amount previously allocated to education and youth and several improvements for students in the programme, ESU also identified shortcomings such as the remaining social disparities and the financial burden that the planned Erasmus Mater Loan Guarantee Facility may put on students.

During the Lithuanian presidency of the EU Council, ESU was invited to a meeting of Directors General for Higher Education from the EU countries that took place on 23 and 24 September 2013. The main topic of discussion was the funding of higher education, focusing on the issues of sustainability, efficiency and equity, as well as addressing reforms of the modernisation of higher education in the Member States. Referring to the conclusions of the meeting, it was clear that the funding of higher education was very much a national issue and that governments were not prepared to delegate any of those responsibilities to the EU.

ESU also used the outcomes of its wide-ranging survey on students’ views on the quality of higher education in discussions on the subject with the European institutions. This survey was referenced in the European Commission’s report on the quality assurance of higher education. ESU also contributed to the discussions taking place at the EU High Level Group on Teaching and Learning.

ESU strived to bring a European perspective into national debates on higher education. ESU’s elected representatives were quoted on a number of occasions by the national and European press, where they were asked about their perspectives on particular policies regarding higher education. As an example, ESU defended the rights of Ukrainian students during their demonstration against the government’s decision to deny to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union.

Additionally, ESU’s events are used to raise awareness about students’ concerns among European policy-makers in higher education. The European Students’ Convention, held twice a year, is held in conjunction with the rotating presidency of the European Union. In 2013, this convention was held in Ireland and Lithuania. Following the meeting in Lithuania, ESU agreed on a statement on the European Commission’s communication for European Higher Education in the World. Earlier, the convention in Ireland had commented on a communication on the social dimension of higher education.

ESU’s cooperation with the European Parliament also intensified in 2013. Following a Board Meeting in December, the students’ union agreed on a manifesto called Vote For Education, portraying their expectations for the European elections in May 2014.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

ESU believes that the Council of Europe has a prominent role in higher education. Based on its firm values, such as democracy, human rights and rule of law, this European institution has a unique perspective to offer, by strongly advocating the multiple purposes of education.

ESU participated in the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee on Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) consisting of government officials, responsible for general and higher education, as well as relevant stakeholders. ESU is also represented in the Bureau of CDPPE that meets twice a year.

Several important discussions took place at the CDPPE in 2013, including recommendations on quality education that were approved by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers. In the next years, the Council of Europe set its priorities to continue its work in the area to develop qualification frameworks with respect to the multiple purposes of education and fight against academic corruption.

The Council of Europe also invited ESU to co-edit a publication on student participation and engagement in Europe, where abstracts for articles were collected from interested contributors. The aim of this publication was threefold, to discuss the role of students in the wider society, investigate the mechanisms and channels of students and their influence on higher education policies. Moreover, it was supposed to look into what entails good governance of representative student bodies and how that can be achieved. Thirty interesting proposals were approved as being relevant for the book.
ESU’S POLICY WORK AND PARTNERSHIPS

**HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS**

ESU considers it to be of utmost importance to cooperate with organisations that are active in the field of higher education. Among those partnerships is the so-called E4 group, consisting of ESU and the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE), European University Association (EUA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). ESU is involved in several policy discussions with those partner organisations and the representatives of ESU commonly invited to speak at joint events.

In addition to those, ESU strived to strengthen its connections to other stakeholders in higher education through meetings and discussions. ESU’s research projects have been extremely useful in this respect, by enhancing its collaboration with students, university bodies and the research society. In addition to the E4 group, ESU cooperates closely with what is sometimes called the E4+, that is the E4 group and in addition Education International, BUSINESS-EUROPE and European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). E4+ worked together, for instance, on a draft for the new European Standards and Guidelines. BUSINESS-EUROPE is a recognised social partner, who speaks for all-sized enterprises in 33 European countries whose national business federations are their direct members. EQAR is a register of quality assurance agencies set up by the E4 group within the Bologna framework. Education International, a global federation of teachers’ trade unions, is among those key partners. With more than 401 member organisations in 172 countries and territories, it represents more than 30 million education personnel from pre-school to university level.

**MEMBERSHIP OF NETWORKS**

ESU is a member of several networks of organisations in the area of education, youth and human rights. In 2013, ESU was pleased to join the European platform SIRIUS that brings together key stakeholders in migration and education. SIRIUS transfers knowledge and influences policy developments in order to help pupils from a migrant background achieve the same educational standards as their native peers.

ESU has also for many years represented students’ interests in the European Youth Forum (YFJ) and continued that active engagement in 2013.

In addition to this, ESU monitored policy discussions on higher education at other relevant intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations Education and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
HIGHLIGHTS IN 2013

EUROPEAN STUDENTS’ CONVENTION 25

Student representatives attending the 25th edition of the European Students’ Convention urged the Council of the European Union to send out a clear message about the social dimension. This wish was expressed to the Council of the European Union that was then discussing a common approach to the issue.

This time, the convention was held in Dublin from 7 to 11 March 2013 in connection to the Irish Presidency to the European Union. The participants requested concrete action plans to in order to improve access for underrepresented groups of the society. They expressed their concerns about the lack of such plans despite the countries’ commitment to the Bologna process and explicit references there of how diversity within each society should be reflected in higher education systems.

Therefore, the students discussed the need for synergies with regards to reinforcing widening access policies. It would be necessary for the European Union to step in to encourage its Member States to adopt specific measures to target underrepresented groups at the national level.

Another issue of major concern discussed during the convention was the shortage of relevant comparable data for designing action plans and monitor their implementation. A commitment to financing support measures for underrepresented groups, such as disabled students and students with an ethnic minority background, was also clearly lacking.

This convention was organised by esu in close cooperation with the Union of Students in Ireland (usi). A number of experts were invited as speakers, including government officials and academics both at universities and think tanks on educational policy, which also helped to get a thorough understanding about the Irish reality.

Ireland was undergoing massive transformations in its higher education system. It also had a broad experience in supporting flexible learning paths, including recognition of prior learning. Irish institutions set up a good example by encouraging and supporting people with fewer opportunities to go into higher education by equipping their staff to deal with social diversity on campus. It was however foreseen, that the economic crisis and budget cuts in education could put in danger many good initiatives.

In a press statement, sent out at the end of the event, esu’s Chairperson, Karina Ufert, said that the social dimension could be put into practice in higher education through sound cooperation among various stakeholder groups. It would however be important to put widened access high on the political agenda. Everyone should have a guaranteed access to higher education and a better quality of life, regardless of their backgrounds.

BOARD MEETING 64

After a year of intensive work, the highest decision making body of esu discussed thoroughly and adopted four core policy papers on higher education during its 64th Board Meeting. The meeting was held in Budapest, Hungary, from 26 to 28 April 2013.

Those policy papers were concerned with the social dimension and access, quality and structural reforms, mobility and internationalisation and financing, governance and commodification of higher education.

The policy papers summarised ongoing policy work and the ones that were adopted in the past by esu. They also tackled strategic issues, such as automatic recognition or multidimensional transparency tools, which defines clearly the mandate for the advocacy work done by esu’s elected representatives. In addition to that, esu’s members endorsed a proposal for a Mobility Treaty, where European countries could agree on compensation mechanisms to support outgoing mobility.
Around 130 representatives of national student unions from all across Europe participated in this meeting that is organised every half a year. esu had set the ambitious target a year before the meeting to fully revise its standing policies to bring more clarity and coherence to the opinions of European students. The meeting in Budapest was therefore a key milestone in that journey.

esu’s board members also discussed a number of other important issues, in order to strengthen the organisation’s activities. Among those decisions was to establish a pool of esu Trainers and facilitators and quality enhancement visits for esu’s member unions. The board also requested a live video stream online from future esu events.

The Board Meetings of esu also serve as a space for student representatives to learn about different national examples in higher education and to express solidarity among students in Europe. In this respect, the Board Meeting also adopted resolutions, for example in support of Swiss students opposing plans to introduce additional tuition fees for non-Swiss residents. Another idea, brought up by the Norwegian students’ union, called for the establishment of a European fund to support students in prosecution for civil activism, was strongly endorsed by the member unions.

Last but not least, the board elected a new Executive Committee and Presidency to lead the organisation and take part in its day-to-day activities with a mandate from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014. Rok Primozic, from Slovenia, was elected as Chairperson along with Elisabeth Gehrke, Sweden, and Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares, Spain, as Vice-Chairpersons.

Other executive members elected were Erin Nordal, Norway, Elin Blomqvist, Finland, Nevena Vuksanovic, Serbia, Blazhe Todorovski, Macedonia, Maroš Korman, Slovakia, Maksims Milt, Lithuania, and Michael Tolentino Frederiksen, Denmark.

EUROPEAN STUDENTS’ CONVENTION 26

International students should not be considered as a source of revenue but as a part of society and have access to necessary support systems, according to a declaration drafted by more than one hundred student representatives participating in the 26th edition of the European Students’ Convention. This convention was held in Kaunas, Lithuania, from 20 to 22 September.

Delegates of national unions of students reviewed a communication document presented by the European Commission to the Council of the European Union entitled “European Higher Education in the World”. The declaration was drafted in the following, presenting the students’ views on the proposal.

The participants defined the fundamental role that education plays within societies and discussed whether that was reflected in the eu’s communication. The students pointed out several things that they would have liked to have seen done differently, but also praised a few positive elements they identified in the document.

Several sessions were organised during the convention in relation to the communication, such as on massive online open courses, student mobility, quality assurance and the social dimension in the internationalisation of higher education. Students discussed their opinions on all these issues that were included in the document.

The students urged European policymakers to take their opinions seriously into account when they would continue their work on developing a policy for the internationalisation of higher education. Students should be recognised as the main stakeholders in that process.
The students’ convention is organised every half a year. This time it was held in conjunction to Lithuania’s Presidency to the Council of the European Union. It was co-organised by ESU and the Lithuanian National Union of Students, LNS. This was the first time the convention was broadcasted live on the internet and made visible to thousands of people that would otherwise have been unable to attend the event.

BOARD MEETING 65

The European Students’ Union (ESU) held a busy Board Meeting in Zagreb, Croatia, in the beginning of December 2013, where representatives of national unions of students adopted thirteen external resolutions, three statements, a policy paper, a financial strategy, a plan of work for 2014, as well as other important documents.

“This was the first time the convention was broadcasted live on the internet and made visible to thousands of people that would otherwise have been unable to attend the event.”

The Board Meeting is organised twice a year in collaboration with the national unions of students that are members of ESU. This time, the Croatian Student Council (CSC) hosted this meeting and made sure that everything ran smoothly.

The participants adopted a statement on the internationalisation of higher education that was based on the discussions that took place at the 26th European Students’ Convention, held in Kaunas, Lithuania, in September. The statement emphasised the need to include students in the decision making process when national and institutional strategies were designed for the internationalisation of higher education. Commenting on the European Commission’s communication for European Higher Education in the World, ESU appreciated that students’ voices were considered and looked forward to deepen its cooperation with the European Commission and other stakeholders in that work.
Another statement, adopted at the Board Meeting, condemned any aggressive acts against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community (LGBTQ). The statement paid particular attention to legislations recently passed in Europe that undermined LGBTQ rights. ESU called on all members of the Council of Europe to act on their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights to protect LGBTQ people and to outlaw all discrimination, either by state or by individuals. ESU furthermore called on the Council of Europe and the European Union to express their revulsion at the events in those countries which saw fit to exploit and oppress their own citizens in this way. ESU finally called on all governments in Europe to proactively fight to defend the rights of all their citizens to health, happiness, and the freedoms to assemble and self-expression.

The third statement was concerned with the European elections in 2014 and ESU’s campaign work for the elections, introducing a manifesto of ten articles that students wanted political candidates to fight for in their work at the European Parliament. This campaign was to be launched in the following year under the name Vote For Education.

Then, the Board Meeting also adopted a policy paper, laying out in detail the views of students on the role that the European Union should play in higher education.

Lastly, the plan of work lists ESU’s actions and political priorities in the upcoming year. Additionally, a financial strategy from 2013 to 2015 was adopted, with ESU’s main priorities and working schedule in that respect.

Additionally, the Board Meeting adopted thirteen external resolutions, where student representatives expressed their opinions on various developments in higher education in Europe. Among the issues covered were demonstrations in Ukraine and Denmark, reforms in the Netherlands, net neutrality, academic integrity, investments in Romanian and Spanish education, housing supplements in Iceland, salary requirements for workers, LGBTQ rights and measures against the uprising of neo-Nazi and neo-Fascist movements in Europe.

**STUDY SESSION IN BUDAPEST**

Thirty experienced students’ representatives from all over Europe gathered in Hungary from 3 to 9 February 2013 to explore different ways to improve organisational knowledge management at European, national and local levels.

Those discussions took place in the form of a study session called “Stronger students’ participation for the open society: sharing practices and developing innovative approaches” held at the European Youth Centre in Budapest. The meeting was organised by the European Students’ Union (ESU) and the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe.

ESU is a complex organisation with a diverse membership structure and a high turnover within its political leadership, with elections organised every year. Similar things can be said about the member unions that operate in different cultural contexts. They have to grasp international trends quickly in order to be efficient in the policymaking processes. Improved knowledge management, including organised training seminars on quality and published toolkits that provide tips for media campaigns, can enhance specific competences. It can also be helpful to improve the level of intercultural literacy, especially in relation to any decision making.

All these demands are not a novelty for membership-based international organisations, such as ESU. Experience shows that it is possible to improve the knowledge management within organisations by involving a community of experts in the field. Therefore, the participants of the study session were invited to shape such a community, by building from scratch a structure that could help in providing quality trainings or other support. As an outcome, a well-defined concept for a trainers and facilitators pool was developed.

Another practical aspect that was discussed during the study session was to develop an idea of quality enhancement visits, meant to assist member unions or candidate unions to ESU in that regard.
MAGNA CHARTA ACADEMIC CEREMONY

From 19 to 20 September 2013, a conference with the overarching theme “Universities, Students and Societies—Connecting Academic Freedom and Creative Cities” was held in Bologna, Italy.

On 18 September 1988, in the presence of many political leaders and representatives of the society, 388 rectors from Europe and beyond signed the Magna Charta Universitatum. The document has since then become the major reference for the fundamental values and principles of the university.

To date, the Magna Charta has been signed by some 750 university leaders from all over the world and each year more universities commit themselves to the principles laid out in the Magna Charta. The higher education scene has developed significantly since 1988, yet the Magna Charta remains relevant to the mission of universities everywhere.

The event in Bologna commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Magna Charta Universitatum where the subject of universities, students and societies and connecting academic freedom and creative cities was discussed gathering experts and participants from universities from all around the world.

The University of Bologna hosted the annual Academic Ceremony on 20 September 2013 for the signing of the Magna Charta by universities who are committed to the principles enlisted in the universitatum.

WORLD CONGRESS

The first World Congress on Access to Post-Secondary education was organised in Montréal, Canada, from 7 to 10 October 2013. This event brought together a large gathering from the global movement for access to higher education and offered a platform in which the conference participants engaged in deep and challenging debates on how post-secondary education can be turned into a real prospect for as many people as possible.

The broad agenda of the conference covered issues from financial mechanisms, through recruitment strategies, to science in society for young children and the recurring issue of gender equality in higher education.

The discussions followed a few main objectives and aims. It strived to identify and link the networks, actors and stakeholders working globally on issues related to the access to higher education. It also facilitated the creation of a new movement for access to higher education with a series of specific communities of practice.

Experimental work and new connections, partnerships and funding mechanisms addressing this issue were identified and launched. The discussions were used to inform key political leaders about the latest thinking and practices from around the world on how to significantly improve access to and success in post-secondary education.

Students were an integral component in this conference that called for an active student participation in higher education, taking a prominent role in discussions, declaration and actions stemming from the congress.

Additionally, the conference allowed the participants to use Canadian experiences and cases to address challenges in higher education, such as urban strategies, rural and remote education delivery, diversity and integration and closing education gaps for Aboriginal people.

The main organisation involved in planning the conference is the European Access Network, but ESU participated in the process as a partner bringing the perspectives of European students into the debate.

It was agreed to hold the second World Congress at Sunway University, Malaysia, in October 2015 in collaboration with local institutions and organisations.
REGIONAL MEETING OF MINISTERS IN ARMENIA

ESU defended students as active participants in the higher education system during a regional meeting of education ministers held in Armenia on 17 and 18 October 2013. Students should not be viewed as passive consumers, but have a word on every aspect of the governance.

Students’ participation was a core theme at this meeting co-organised by the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia, the Council of Europe and ESU, under the aegis of the Armenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

ESU was happy to participate in intense debates on this subject at the meeting and that the national delegations expressed their commitment to facilitate student participation in higher education governance.

The participants also broadly discussed self-certifications and implementation of national qualifications frameworks. It was a clear understanding that students must be involved at all levels of the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks.

The final declaration—adopted by the national delegations of Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation and Ukraine—pledged a commitment of national delegations to enhance student centred learning and expressed their willingness to strengthen transparency by providing more information on their higher education systems, qualifications and policies. The participants in the meeting were evidently satisfied with the results of sharing experiences and good practices.

Several delegates of ESU addressed the conference in Armenia as well as national student representatives from the Armenian National Student Association (ANSA), that is a member union of ESU.

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FORUM

More than five hundred people participated in the eighth edition of the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) that was organised in Gothenburg, Sweden, from 21 to 23 November 2013. This time, the event focused on how quality of higher education could be taken forward, how individuals and organisation could better understand the role that quality assurance plays in daily lives, get involved and work together.

EQAF is the main platform in Europe addressing quality assurance in higher education, bringing together all the key stakeholders in the field, such as representatives of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, policy-makers, researchers and students. The discussions taking place at EQAF are a major contribution to developing quality assurance in higher education across Europe.

This is an annual event co-organised by the so-called E4 Group, consisting of the higher education associations ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE. The ninth version of the EQAF will be hosted by the University of Barcelona in Spain and will be held in November 2014. More information on how organisations and individuals can participate in the event can be accessed on the websites of the E4 partners.
OUR PROJECTS

The European Students’ Union runs various projects that are used to support the policy work of the union’s Executive Committee and Working Groups. Those projects deal mainly with the social dimension and quality of higher education, with the aim of improving quality assurance processes. They are also used to raise awareness among stakeholders and to actively involve student representatives in policymaking processes in higher education.

WWW.FINST.ESU-ONLINE.ORG • FINST

The outcomes of the three year-long project called Financing the Students’ Future, or FinSt for short, were presented at the end of January 2013. This research project focused on building capacity among students and students union to participate in debates about the financing and public responsibility of higher education. The findings were presented in a special Research Compendium and a toolkit was also made to support students to organise actions relevant to the subject. All the main findings are accessible on the project’s website. Although the FinSt project has officially finished, esu will continue to use its findings in discussions on the financing of higher education and to give voice to its member organisations.

WWW.QUEST.ESU-ONLINE.ORG • QUEST

A final conference for esu’s project called Quest for Quality for Students (QUEST) was held in October 2013, where students’ views on the quality of higher education and ways to engage students in quality assurance and enhancement were presented. A special website dedicated to the subject and several publications were created in order to encourage a continuing participation of students in quality assurance and to increase stakeholders’ awareness of the subject. Among the most important publications in this respect is the Student Handbook on Quality Assurance, presenting the basics of quality assurance and enhancement activities to students. As part of this project, esu has also developed a Students Experts’ Pool on Quality Assurance with more than 60 participants, to support students’ work in quality assurance in Europe.

WWW.SAGE.ESU-ONLINE.ORG • SAGE

Student Advancement of Graduates’ Employability, or SAGE for short, is a project that looks into the different aspects that contribute to the employability of graduates and the initiatives on employability that are led by the European Union. In 2014, the project will enter its final stages and the research team behind it will in the following months publish a study on employability and a handbook on the subject. Those publications are the result of a survey that was launched in the beginning of 2013, as well as a training session that took place in April that year in Hungary. The main outcomes of SAGE will be presented at its final conference in March 2014.
ESU started a new project named PASCL, or Peer Assessment for Student Centered Learning, in October 2013. This project is funded by the ERASMUS Programme and uses the findings and expertise from an older project referred to as PL4SD, with the aim of implementing sound student-centred learning (SCL) strategies and approaches at institutional level and fostering a SCL culture at higher education institutions in Europe. A study with an overview of SCL procedures in Europe will be presented in 2014 that will contribute to the development of SCL in Europe. Later this year, training in SCL will be prepared for selected experts.

ESPAQ

In a reply to the sixth call for proposals within the TEMPUS programme, ESU submitted an application for the ESPAQ project (Enhancing the Student Participation in Quality Assurance in Armenia) that was approved for funding. The overall objective of the ESPAQ project is to strengthen the quality assurance (QA) processes and practices in higher education in Armenia by ensuring that all stakeholders are involved, especially students as the key beneficiaries.

The ESPAQ project started officially in December 2013 and will finish in three years. The project will cover the following core activities:

- Empower students to participate in QA on the level of designing processes and implementing procedures;
- Foster a Quality Culture among students and staff at higher education institutions, by building an understanding and insight into the process of change and the key drivers for success in practice;
- Create a sustainable structure at the national level to improve student participation in quality assurance, encourage peer learning and improve visibility of their actions to the wider academic community;
- Promote the project and its outcomes and ensure its sustainability and wide acceptance among all the stakeholders (also outside Armenia, i.e. in the neighbouring countries).

OTHER PROJECTS

Based on the demonstrated expertise and experience that the European Students’ Union (ESU) has gained from EU funded projects, the organisation has been involved in several ongoing projects as a partner.

ESU contributed to the overall implementation and finalisation of the Enhancing Access through a Focus on Equity (Equnet) project that had been running for three years. The project achieved its aims to promote better access to higher education in Europe for all groups of society, particularly those coming from non-traditional forms of education, and to bring together practitioners, experts and policy makers to create an organisational framework for intensive networking.
In continuation of Equinet and with the participation of its core partners, a new project was launched in October 2013, called Identifying Effective Approaches to Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher Education (IDEAS). ESU and the other partners will create a database enlisting initiatives (programmes/policies/projects) that enhance equity in access, participation and completion of higher education across Europe. They will also analyse the data to look for evidences of causal links between the initiatives and improvements in equity for their target groups. The hope is that this research will manage to increase the understanding of the environmental, social and political factors that pave the way for success. Finally, successful examples will be identified and disseminated widely to promote good practices throughout Europe.

The PL4SD project has been running for about a year. The project maps the existing measures taken inside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and facilitates peer learning among countries. The PL4SD project will develop a new standard for the systemising measures targeted at improving the social dimension by collecting data and making it accessible online for discussions and evaluations. ESU’s project on Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning is born out of the first findings of the PL4SD research.

ESU continued its involvement in the “Students guidance at university for inclusion—STAY IN” project, focusing on improving educational guidance and inclusion of disadvantaged social groups. By October 2014, the project has to develop an integrated guidance and counselling system for universities with the goal of lowering drop-out rates and increasing the participation of adults, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those that are considered being at risk in tertiary education. The project is coordinated by Macerata University, Italy.

As a partner in the UniteIT project (Uniting Europe through digital empowerment), ESU exchanges practices, shares resources and visions on digital competence for inclusion and raising awareness about the topic. The first annual project conference was held in October 2013 in Malta together with the Telecentre-Europe Summit.
IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF STUDENT SERVICES
The prime objective of the project on Improving the Efficiency of Student Services (IMPRESS) is to establish new management structures in four leading classical universities in Ukraine by creating fully operational and modern student support service centres in four Ukrainian universities: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Donetsk National University, Lviv Ivan Franko National University and Kharkiv National University. ESU’s contribution to implementing the project’s aims in the first year have been highly appreciated and recognised by Ukrainian authorities. ESU’s role as a partner for internal quality assurance will increase with its experience from the QUEST project and a recommendation from the national Tempus office.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
Another project with a similar scope, called Building Capacity for University Management in the ENPI South Region (BUCUM), focuses on governance reforms involving ten universities in Libya, Morocco, Egypt and Lebanon to fulfil the regional priorities of the ‘University Management and Student Services’. Not much progress was achieved in 2013 due to the complicated and fragile political situation in the region. The Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK, is the coordinator of the project and is taking the necessary steps to adapt the action plan for this year.

SPEAQ AND QUAEM
Quality assurance in higher education has been one of the key areas addressed by ESU in the past years. ESU finished its work on the SPEAQ project (Sharing Practice in Enhancing and Assuring Quality) and is continuing its involvement in the Quality Assurance in Higher education in Moldova (QUAEM) project.

QUAEM aims to develop a national quality assurance strategy for Moldova, in cooperation with higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and students’ representatives. The project is being coordinated by Leipzig University, Germany, in collaboration with twelve other partners of which eight are from Moldova. ESU has been working on the task to enhance the Moldavian students’ knowledge by providing a training session on quality assurance and raising awareness among students and university staff on quality from the students’ perspective. The trainings have been provided by student-experts from the QUEST QA Students Experts’ Pool.

The SPEAQ project, on the other hand, connected teachers, students and quality managers in order to enhance quality assurance practices in higher education. Small projects on a department or faculty level were implemented by the project’s consortium where ESU participated in consultation meetings and assisted in disseminating the project’s outcomes. Like in QUAEM, there has been a good synergy between the SPEAQ and QUEST projects. All the small projects were developed as a result of the findings of focus groups’ discussions where students expressed their views for improving the services and overall student experience at their universities. Most of the discussions were facilitated by the QUEST QA Students Experts’ Pool members.

SIS CATALYST
The FP7 funded project called SIS Catalyst will be brought to an end in 2014. Like in the previous year, ESU will continue to implement the internship programme specially designed to achieve the objectives of the project and to involve students in science and society activities with children. Seven students were selected as interns for relevant projects within universities and children universities in the United Kingdom, Austria, the Netherlands, and Ethiopia. Two more will be selected soon for internships in the United States in 2014.

The experiences of students and host organisations from the internship programmes will be collected in the final report that ESU will produce in October 2014.

NEW PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS
In addition to IDEAS, a few more partnership projects started in 2013:

The EUROGRADUATE study is set to prepare the ground for a European monitoring of higher education graduates. It will start out from the current disparate situation of different research designs, methods and organisations, which collect and analyse such data. It aims to develop a method to overcome the gaps through a joint action of countries and data providers that will provide national
and international policymakers, higher education institutions, the labour market, students and researchers, with necessary data. This data can be used to evaluate, monitor and compare the success of higher education graduates, measure the effects of policies and assess the attainment of benchmarks and goals.

**EUROGRADUATE** is a two-year project that started in October 2013 and the first consortium meeting was hosted by the coordinator Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung DZWH, Hanover, Germany.

Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions. Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Transdisciplinary Impact Evaluation—**IMPALA**—is a three year ERASMUS funded project that aims at improving the knowledge and know-how of all stakeholders about the outputs, outcomes, effects and (mid- and long-term) impacts of European quality assurance procedures (EQA). During the implementation phase, ESU will contribute to the:

- Development and application of a comprehensive methodology of IA of EQA procedures in higher education institutions which is flexible to be adjusted to different kinds of EQA procedures;

- Simultaneity of the IA with baseline study and before-after comparison (quasi-experimental design);

- Integrated incorporation of all members and students of the higher education institutions in the IA;

- Analysis and comparison of the impacts of different EQA procedures as well as of the various actors’s perception of and judgement on EQA procedure impacts;

- Analysis of the role of EQA procedures in changing and improving the support (and core) processes of higher education institutions;

- Improvement of the understanding of the causal relationship between QA and organisational change;

- The project coordinator is the Evaluation Agency (Evaluationsagentur) Baden Württemberg (evalag), Germany.

- ESPRIT, or Enhancing the Social Characteristics and Public Responsibility of Israeli Teaching through a HEI-Student Alliance, is a three-year project funded by the TEMPUS programme that addresses both university management and services for students and equal and transparent access to higher education. The project’s activities include;

  - Gathering data to outline the current scope of social engagement in Israeli higher education institutions;

  - Developing a model for the building of curricula with a social engagement component;

  - Training specialists in the development of courses with a social engagement element;

  - Implementing a pilot project on socially involved modules incorporating Bologna objectives (lifelong learning, student centred learning, ECTS, learning outcomes);

  - Preparing a methodology for the building of a social benchmarking tool for higher education institutions;

  - Implementing a social benchmark pilot in Israeli higher education institutions;

  - Developing new modalities for the student-higher education institutional relationship;

  - Introducing comprehensive quality measures accompanying the project from its onset and ensuring ongoing compliance with its objectives.

The first partners meeting is on 25–28 January hosted by the coordinator-Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.
ESU’s core function is to improve the conditions of students. This aim expands much further beyond the borders of those countries where ESU’s member unions are present.

A position for a Coordinator for Human Rights and Solidarity was created to enhance ESU’s work in the field of human rights. ESU believes it is the organisation’s duty to promote human rights, monitor the state of human rights within the student population and respond to any threats to human rights within and beyond the education sector. The rights to dignity, freedom of expression and assembly are only a few of the fundamental human rights essential to make sure that all students get quality higher education and full participation in society.

In 2013, ESU worked on several activities and meetings where human rights, in particular the rights of people to receive education, were in the limelight. ESU followed, for example, closely the European Union’s and the Council of Europe’s work on human rights education, fight against discrimination in education and all other areas. ESU also sought a closer cooperation with the Students at Risk programme and the Norwegian Students’ and Academics’ International Assistance Fund (SAIH).

As part of its public policy, ESU contributed actively to public campaigns on human rights and student or higher education related issues all around the world. ESU also launched a big campaign for the International Day of Students 17 November 2013 in cooperation with the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), calling students to stand up for their rights and take action.

Additionally, ESU contributed to several other campaigns on human rights issues, such as the No Hate Speech Movement, Human Rights Day and the International Refugee Day and by supporting the citizens initiative Invest in Education. It also defended the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to equal treatment.

ESU was concerned about several abuses to student rights across Europe and in other parts of the world in 2013, which it commented on or raised awareness about throughout the year. Syrian students were for example hit hard by the civil war in their country and many of them were unable to continue their course of studies. Several Syrian students got in touch with ESU to explain how higher education institutions no longer represented a safe environment due to external manipulations and attacks. ESU tried to provide those students with advice and assistance.

To mention another example from countries where ESU’s member unions are operating, Ukrainian and Bulgarian students were also denied their right to assemble and to freely express themselves as the governments targeted students that protested their government’s decisions.

ESU’s Board Meetings are also a forum in which 47 national unions of students come together to discuss issues related to student and human rights. Regularly those unions adopt resolutions and agree on positions on work that needs to be taken forward.

One of those activities was concerned with the United Nations’ work on the post-2015 development agenda, where ESU emphasised how important it would be to include access to quality higher education in the new set of goals.
Public relations are a key function in ESU’s activities on an annual basis. An active communication with member unions, partners, stakeholders and the media is a part of this long-term strategy.

Social media is a strategic tool used to create awareness about ESU’s positions and activities, ranging from meetings and conferences to published reports, surveys, statements and relevant articles. All elected representatives at ESU have been encouraged to contribute to this goal, by promoting events they participate in or join open discussions online on matters of higher education. ESU’s social media channels continued to grow in 2013 and its official Facebook page saw more than thirty thousand followers at the end of the year.

ESU’s monthly newsletter the Student Voice continues to be the most important element in ESU’s dissemination activities. With more than four thousand subscribers, ESU uses the newsletter to update those contacts about its work. Additionally, ESU comments on issues that are more urgent and being discussed at the national or European level. It also provides its member unions with support and advice on national issues from a European perspective. Anyone can subscribe to ESU’s newsletter for free on ESU’s official website.

ESU strives to keep a good contact with the media and its elected representatives answer often questions from journalists that are looking for an input from the European student movement to particular stories. More articles were published by the media in 2013 than in previous years, partly due to good support from ESU’s member unions in translating press statements into their languages and reaching the national media.
WHAT HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT US?

“The student movement is not afraid of idealism and wears the label, often used as an accusation, as a badge of pride. We are idealistic, we are ambitious, we are brave and we will insist on the future of education being a universal right,” wrote Aengus O’Maoláin, ESU’s Equality Coordinator.


“Under the loan plan, which is opposed by the European Students’ Union, students from any discipline will be able to access loans of up to €18,000 ($24,600) to cover the total cost of a two-year master’s in any country apart from their own.”


“We hope that the European Parliament, which pledged last autumn to save the investments in education and youth, will demonstrate its political capacity to renegotiate the bill for Erasmus for all programme,” said Karina Ufert, Chairperson of the European Students’ Union.


“As the situation for young people is worsening and youth unemployment is at a record high, there will be more and more desperate graduates willing to find a chance to get some experience, even under very bad conditions,” wrote Rok Primožič, Chairperson of ESU.


“ESU would like to remind the Bulgarian government that it firmly stands for ‘the right of all students to freely express themselves and this should not be limited to academic matters’ (as protected by Art.14 of the Students’ Rights Charter).”

Novinite, 17 November 2013.

“How can you follow us?

On Twitter @esutwt
By looking for the European Students Union on Facebook
By looking for the European Students Union on Linkedin
By looking for the European Students Union on Pinterest
By looking for the European Students Union on Youtube
On Storify at www.storify.com/esutwt

By subscribing to our newsletter the Student Voice
By visiting our homepage www.esu-online.org
We also started to use Scribd and Issuu!
Look us up, and read our publications.

“The European Students Union (ESU) has been critical of the measure, saying it acts as a guarantee to the banks, so they would not lose their profits, but not as a guarantee for students, so that they will get a well-paid job to repay their debt after getting a degree.”

Science Business, 4 July 2013.
The work developed in 2013 brought a fresh approach to the membership area. At the end of the year, it was clearer what questions needed to be addressed in this area. A clear and coherent strategy was presented that provided the ground for improved work in this field in the future.

Amendments were also proposed to ESU’s statutes and standing orders, contributing to a more comprehensive internal work strategy on membership policies. An internal proposal for conducting quality enhancement visits was presented as well.

An internal task force for membership issues was created in order to bring a more coherent approach to the understanding of membership policies on a long-term basis and an ambitious work plan.

Last but not least, the long-anticipated Pool of Trainers was set ashore. However, some questions regarding its practicalities and operation still needed to be addressed.

ESU proudly welcomed the International Association of Political Science Students (IAPSS) as a new Associate Member at the end of the year. IAPSS has around eighteen thousand members from more than eighty countries all around the world. The association was established in 1998 in Leiden, the Netherlands, and is student-led, working non-profit with a politically independent structure. The headquarters of IAPSS are now hosted by Radbound University in Nijmegen.

By the end of the year, ESU also welcomed an application for a full membership from the Turkish Youth Association (T-Youth). This Turkish association of students is one of the country’s biggest stakeholders in higher education. It collaborates actively with the Student Council of Turkey, which is also a candidate for full membership of ESU. T-Youth works on issues such as student rights and organises youth projects, supports activism and social responsibility.

ESU Membership Directory in 2013

Armenia Armenia National Students Association (ANSA) Austria Österreichische HochschülerInnenschaft (ÖH) Azerbaijan Azerbajian Students Union (ASU), Azerbajian Student Youth Organisations’ Union (ASYOU) Belarus Belarus Student Association (BSA) Belgium Fédération Des Etudiants Francophones (FEF), Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten (VVS) Bulgaria Barski Studentski (UBS), Nacionaal Predstavitelstvo na Studentskite Saveti v Republika Balgaria (NASC) Bosnia & Herzegovina Studentska Unija Republika Srpska (SURS) Croatia Hrvatski Studentski Zbor (CSC) Cyprus Pagkyprija Omospondia Foititikon Enoseon (POFEN) Czech Republic Studentská Komora Rady (SKRVS) Denmark Danske Studerendes Fællesråd (DSF) Finland Suomen ammattikorkeakoululuopiskelijakuntien liitto (SAMOK), Suomen Ylioppilaskuntien Liitto (SYL) Estonia Eesti Üliõpilaskondade Liit (EÜL) France Fédération des Associations Générales D’Etudiants (FAGE) Union Nationale des Etudiants de France (UNEF) Georgia Students Organizations League of Georgia (SOLG) Germany Freie Zusammenschluss von StudentInnenschaften (FZS) Hungary Hallgatói Önkormányzatok Országos Konferenciája (HÖOK) Iceland Stúdentaráð Háskóla Íslands (SHÍ) Ireland Union of Students in Ireland (USI) Israel National Union of Israeli Students (NUIS) Italy Unione degli Universitari (UdU) Latvia Latvijas Studentu Apvieniba (LSA) Lithuania Lietuvos Studentu Sąjunga (LSS) Luxembourg Union Nationale des Etudiant(e)s du Luxembourg (UNEL), Luxembourg University Students’ Organization (LUS) Macedonia National Union of Students of Macedonia (NUSM) Malta Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (KSU) Netherlands Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (ISO), Landelijke Studenten Vakbond (LSVb) Norway Norsk studentorganisasjon (NSO) Poland Parlament Studentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (PSRP) Portugal Fórum Académico para a Informação e Representação Externa (FAIRE) Romania Alianta Nationala a Organizatiilor Studentesti din Romania (ANOSR) Serbia Studentska Unija Srbije (SUS), Student Conference of Serbian Universities (SKONUS) Slovakia Študentská Rada Vysok.ch škol (SRVS) Slovenia Studenska Organizacija Slovenije (SSU) Spain Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de Universidades Públicas (CREUP) Sweden Sveriges Förenade Studentkårer (SFS) Switzerland Verband der Schweizerischen StudentInnenschaften, (VSS-UNES-USU) Ukraine Ukrainian Association of Student Self-government (UASS) UK National Union of Students (NUS-UK)
A GLIMPSE ON STUDENT CAMPAIGNING IN 2013

UKRAINE

Students took an active role in the largest civil demonstrations in Ukraine since the Orange Revolution in 2004. They were to a large extent a result of the government’s decision to reject to finalise an agreement with the European Union on an Association Agreement.

The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union contained very important points for reforming the higher education system in the country. They include the implementation of Bologna process action lines, the establishment of a quality assurance system, more attention to equal access to higher education, the development of opportunities for cooperation between higher education institutions in Ukraine and EU member states and more opportunities for students academic staff mobility.

DENMARK

On 28 February and 27 November, thousands of Danish students took to the streets to protest the government’s proposal to change the student support system, referred to as the “Study Acceleration Reform”. It was expected that these changes would have severe negative consequences for all students enrolled in secondary and tertiary education.

DSF, the national union of students in Denmark, urged the government to withdraw the proposed changes and planned numerous demonstrations with fellow students in vocational and secondary education to raise awareness about the possible consequences.

BULGARIA

In Bulgaria, students joined a widespread civil demonstration on 23 October and became the main voice and actors fighting against corruption in the country. The protests originated in mid-June after Oresharski’s government controversially appointed Delyan Peevski as head of the State Agency for National Security.

“THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS STORMED TO THE PARLIAMENT OF FINLAND ON WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH TO DEFEND THE COUNTRY’S STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.”

Students raised awareness about issues related to corruption within the administrative system in Bulgaria and organised demonstrations all across the country. This movement resulted in a governmental change in Bulgaria following democratic elections.

ICELAND

Following unsuccessful rounds of negotiations with Icelandic authorities and the Student Loan Fund in Iceland (LIN) on higher education reforms, especially in relation to student support and payment system, the national union of students in Iceland launched a court case to settle the dispute. The court eventually ruled in favour of students in September and the government had to withdraw its proposal.

This case was an inspiration for student activism across Europe, proving that students should be included in policy-making processes at all levels.
A GLIMPSE ON STUDENT CAMPAIGNING IN 2013

NETHERLANDS

On Monday 27 May, representatives of LSVb, national union of students in the Netherlands, met Jet Bussemaker, the country’s Minister for Education, to hand her more than six thousand postcards written by students opposing plans to reform the higher education system.

The reforms include major cuts to the grant system for students in the Netherlands and abolishment of student benefits, such as free access to public transportation. Additionally, the government planned to cut the grants so that more students would have to pay for their studies with loans. Students believe that the reforms may limit severely access to higher education if they are carried through putting an unjustified debt on the shoulders of future generations.

BELGIUM

Massive protests were organised in the biggest cities in Belgium on Thursday 28 March to protest decreasing financial support for students, inflexible study programmes and to call for more public investments in higher education.

Students demanded also quality education that would be accessible to everyone and proper funds for education. Rallies, demonstrations and other actions organised during that week illustrated the dearth of resources for higher education.

FINLAND

Thousands of students stormed to the Parliament of Finland on Wednesday 20 March to defend the country’s student support system for higher education.

The students stressed that they wanted to retain the current structure for financial aid which is favouring grants over loans. They also wanted to remind the government of the promises it had made two years earlier, including modifications to the study aid given to upper secondary school students that is limited on their parents’ income. The students have reminded Finnish politicians that everyone should have the possibility to gain a higher education degree, regardless of their financial capabilities or family background.

HUNGARY

Students reached an agreement with the government on Hungary in January following massive demonstrations against a governmental proposal to reform the country’s higher education system.

The students protested the government’s plan to cut the budget for higher education, resulting in significantly fewer study places, and to implement study contracts, obliging graduates to stay in Hungary following their studies. Students were furthermore invited to join a roundtable group to discuss policies for higher education.
ESU STRUCTURE AND FINANCES

THIS IS HOW ESU WORKS

Over the past decades, ESU has gradually moved from being a regional information exchange bureau to a strong and an established voice representing students in Europe, with 47 national unions of students from 39 countries on board (December 2013). This development has followed external factors such as the emerging European higher education system and improved student mobility.

ESU has directed its political focus towards institutions that are based in Brussels, aiming at shaping policies in higher education and guarding the interests of students in Europe which is the primary goal of ESU. In order to serve this purpose, ESU has undergone an exhaustive self-evaluation process that came to an end in mid-2011. As a result, the political structure of the organisation was changed where new representatives were voted in two consecutive Board Meetings held in Tallinn in May 2011 and Sofia in November 2011. These changes reflect the need for an organisation such as ESU to have flexible working methods while strengthening its role in Europe at the same time.

ESU actively seeks new methods for students and to widen its network to provide crucial advice and consultancy in relations to higher education reforms and students’ involvement. Undoubtedly it is important to ensure that ESU’s membership base has a shared sense of an identity for a European organisation, eager to improve its internal culture and commit to its work. As the external environment demands action on behalf of students, it is incredibly important that ESU serves as a uniting platform for student unions fighting to reach sustainable, accessible and high quality higher education in Europe. Achieving on the agreed priorities means that ESU must focus on building on the available resources, organising capacity building, managing internal and external communications, re-allocating as well as finding new resources. This was a clear message sent at ESU’s Board Meetings in 2011.

ADAPTING TO A CHANGING CLIMATE

Earlier, ESU operated several working groups whose responsibilities were later integrated in one common Executive Committee composed of ten members including one Chairperson and two Vice-Chairpersons. Those representatives are elected every year at ESU’s Board Meeting, which acts as ESU’s highest governing body. Their mandate starts in July and ends in June the following year. The Chairpersons are full-time employees based in Brussels.

ESU’s work is also supported by three Coordinators who are selected by the Executive Committee with a mandate of one year and a half, responsible for topics such as human rights, solidarity, equality and membership issues.

Additionally, ESU is supported by a professional secretariat of five staff members consisting of an office manager, a project officer, a project assistant, an executive assistant and a communications’ manager.

ESU WORKING GROUPS

ESU operated two working groups that were responsible for getting more insight on specific topics. An Ethnic Minorities Working Group (EMWG) was established during the 57th Board Meeting of ESU, held in Krakow, Poland, in 2009. This working group was chaired by the Dutch student union LSVb. The national unions of students SAMOK, Finland, and ANOSR, Romania, also took part in the working group. The whole working group was coordinated by the equality coordinator and one EC member (or you can say two student representatives if you don’t want to be specific) The aim of the working group was to research the obstacles that students with an ethnic minority or migrant background face in their education, and to present best practices in a publication to promote the rights of those students and respect for diversity in relation to the economic crisis.
ESU seeks to develop its actions in collaboration with students from all around the world. Thus, ESU created the Global Student Cooperation Working Group (GSCWG) as an important tool to tackle issues such as equal access to education and students’ rights on a global level. The aim was also to create on such global issues a stronger student voice and reinforce ESU’s cooperation and solidarity with students outside Europe. ESU focused on working together with regional and national student representations in its effort to create a sustainable international dialogue among students. The working group was chaired by NSO, Norway and coordinated by the Coordinator for Human Rights and Solidarity at ESU. The other members of the working group were LSA, Latvia, DSF, Denmark, NUS UK, United Kingdom, CREUP, Spain and ÖH, Austria.

STUDENTS’ CONTRIBUTION TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EUROPE

In 2013, ESU finished its three-years-long project, Quest for Quality for Students (QUEST). Besides a special website that was created for the project (www.quest.esu-online.org) there were 5 publications introduced (all of them are available on the quest website). One of the publications is the Student Handbook on Quality Assurance, presenting the basics of quality assurance and enhancement activities to students.

In 2009, ESU established a pool of committed and well-trained students with the aim of contributing to the improvement of higher education provisions in Europe through quality assurance procedures. The pool is renewed once a year where an independent Steering Committee is responsible for launching calls for new members and selecting the applicants based on public criteria.

ESU has actively promoted and developed student participation in quality assurance all over Europe this way in the past years. At the end of 2013, there were 64 students registered in the pool from 28 different countries in Europe.

ESU organises regular study sessions, workshops and other events for the members of the pool to strengthen their capacity in quality assurance provisions on a systematic basis. The pool has proven to be an excellent initiative, as it brings together the experience and knowledge of students from all over Europe, creating a platform for debates, sharing different opinions and learning about quality assurance. Those students also contribute to ESU’s policy making, act as multiplying agents in their respective countries, collaborate in several projects, participate in quality assurance reviews, etc.

ESU has also signed cooperation agreements with the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), as well as six national quality assurance agencies, to provide student experts for external reviews. Those agreements have strengthened students’ involvement and influence in quality assurance provisions to a great extent.

If you want to find out more about the work of the students’ experts pool, you can visit ESU’s homepage or ESU’s web site that is dedicated to the quality of higher education www.quest.esu-online.org or send the Steering Committee an e-mail at qapoolsc@esu-online.org.

ESU FINANCES IN 2013

To be able to develop its projects and continue its operation, ESU—as a non-governmental organisation—relies mainly on the annual contributions coming from its members and on funds from European and international institutions.

The main income sources for 2013 were project grants received from the European Commission, which also approved an operating grant to support ESU’s core activities and overall sustainability.
Additionally, ESU received a grant from the Belgian organisation “Fonds Maribel Social du Secteur Socioculturel” to fund the part-time position of an executive assistant.

The 2013 expenditures’ structure remained the same, being directly related to projects and activities and supporting ESU to reach the planned aims, in order to deliver all the outcomes foreseen in its annual plan of work. This was possible with the valuable contribution of the team of professionals in the ESU Secretariat and the group of elected representatives working together.

Staff costs decreased through the restructuring of the ESU Secretariat, in September 2013, when a new position—office manager—was created. This position took over the financial and administrative tasks, and the part-time position of a project assistant was eliminated.

The cost of maintaining an office in Brussels and other administrative expenses represents only a small share of ESU’s annual expenses.

ESU also allocated a modest financial support to its elected representatives to cover a part of their work-related expenses.

The financial result was positive in 2013, which made it possible to balance the previous years’ negative results.

ESU would like to thank the European Commission and Maribel for their continued support. ESU wants to thank as well its partners for their financial support that enabled ESU’s elected representatives to participate in dozens of higher education conferences, meetings and workshops in 2013 to voice the students’ perspectives. Also, we would like to thank our members for supporting ESU’s activities and much more.
Substantial work was carried out by the European Students’ Union (ESU) in 2013 on its internal policy papers. By the end of the year, ESU was able to proudly present a full set of revised policy papers following an internal revision process. Those policy papers were formally adopted by ESU’s Board Meetings in 2013.

The new policy papers clarify ESU’s use of concepts and its views on particular subjects in higher education. The introduction to the policy papers explains the purpose and possible outcomes of higher education from the students’ point of view. It clearly defines higher education as an inalienable and fundamental human right. As such, it must be open to all parts of the society, independent from background, age or any other factor. Thus, higher education should be made affordable to everyone and respond to each individual need. Positive measures should be taken to reduce the obstacles to higher education for vulnerable groups.

Regarding public responsibility, the policy paper explains in detail students’ views on the financing of higher education. It declares students as members of a higher education community, who share the responsibility and rights to govern this central institution of human civilisation. Students should not be treated as a commodity or consumers of the higher education system, but as full participants and partners.

With regards to the quality of higher education, ESU believes it should be a priority discussion topic within the higher education society in Europe. An education of high quality is accessible and facilitates progress and completion, implements a student-centred approach to learning and fairly assesses students. The system should be braced by adequate student support services, connecting learning, teaching and research activities. It should also provide individual, social and civic training for responsible and active citizens, mobility opportunities and academic freedom.

On internationalisation, ESU recognises the increasingly important role that international students play in the academic society. However, the mobile student population remains an elitist group and a privilege of the few. Equal possibilities should be ensured within the process of internationalisation of higher education institutions.
ESU’S STRUCTURE

BOARD MEETING
- Each country is given two votes regardless of the national unions that are registered there. At the end of 2013, unions from 39 countries were registered as full members of ESU. All of them appointed their representatives to this body.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
- Ten representatives elected by ESU’s Board Members on a yearly basis responsible for executing policies and decisions taken by the Board.

VICE-CHAIRPERSONS
- Two members of the Executive Committee are elected to be fully employed to represent and support the work of the organisation in Brussels.

CHAIRPERSON
- One elected member of the Executive Committee who acts as ESU’s highest full time political representative and spokesperson.

COORDINATORS
- Three individuals selected by the Executive Committee with a mandate of one and a half year responsible for specific policies.

COMMISSION FOR INTERNAL AUDIT
- Acts as an independent financial advisory body to the EC and the Board. The CIA carries out internal audits of ESU and presents them at every Board Meeting.

SECRETARIAT
- Unpolitical staff responsible for running the organisation and supporting the policies or decisions taken by ESU’s political representatives.
QUALITY ASSURANCE STEERING COMMITTEE

Five members responsible for coordinating the work of the quality assurance pool and launching calls for new members. Three of the members are selected from the qa pool itself and the other two are members from the Executive Committee in order to support their work.

QUALITY ASSURANCE POOL

At the end of 2013, there were 64 students registered in the pool from 28 different countries in the Europe.

ETHNIC MINORITIES WORKING GROUP

Representatives of three national unions and two representatives of ESU participate in this working group.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND ESU

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MANDATE 2012–13

- Karina Ufert (Chairperson), Rok Primozic (Vice-Chairperson),
- Taina Moisander (Vice-Chairperson),
- Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares, Florian Kaiser, Blazhe Todorovski, Tinja Zerzer, Nevena Vuksanovic, Elisabeth Gehrke, Liliya Ivanova.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MANDATE 2013–14

- Rok Primozic (Chairperson), Elisabeth Gehrke (Vice-Chairperson), Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares (Vice-Chairperson),
- Erin Nordal, Elin Blomqvist, Nevena Vuksanovic, Blazhe Todorovski, Maroš Korman, Maksimas Milta, Michael Tolentino Frederiksen.

SECRETARIAT AT THE END OF 2013

Beate Espenes (Executive Assistant),
Natalia Tarachiu (Office Manager),
Robert Hlynur Baldursson (Communications Manager),
Stela Stancheva (Project Officer).

COORDINATORS AT THE END OF 2013

Gabriela Bergan (Human Rights and Solidarity),
Tiago Estevao Martins (Membership Issues),
Aengus Ó Maoláin (Equality)

STEWERING COMMITTEE QA STUDENT EXPERTS POOL

Asnate Kažoka, Blazhe Todorovski (second half 2013), Dan Derricott,
Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares, Henni Saarela, Karina Ufert (first half 2013)
THE EUROPEAN STUDENTS’ UNION

The European Students’ Union (ESU) is an umbrella organisation of 47 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 39 countries (November 2013). The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Through its members, ESU represents over 11 million students in Europe.