

HOW ESIB -THE NATIONAL UNIONS OF STUDENTS GOT INTO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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Introduction

It was February 1999, when the 1999 ESIB Executive Committee [EC] and the new Secretary General (myself) 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 contents of the “alternative” 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 – confidently – 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 European 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, ESU 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. Syl 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), Farid Tabarki (LSVb Netherlands), Ida Mielityinen (SyL Finland), and – appointed in 2000 - Jacob Henricson (SFS Sweden) and Lukas Vylupek (SK RVS 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 ESU 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 their 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 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 Redding, 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. The 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 Summit) 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 Östros, 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. Lourtie 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 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 opportunity 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:

ESIB’s Student Göteborg Declaration (2001)	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><i>“...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.”</i></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><i>“Students are an equal part of HE community”.</i></p> <p><i>“Publicly funded HE must remain the main form of HE in the future.”</i></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 HEIs.”</p>

Waking up of the “sleeping giant”

Prague Ministerial Communique 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 Communique 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.