



**Board Meeting 65**

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**KAUNAS DECLARATION**

4 Internationalisation of higher education has become a reality with a  
5 systematic increase in both short-term and full-cycle mobility. It plays an  
6 important role in enhancing intercultural competences and  
7 understanding, which is very important in the globalised world and is  
8 crucial for the development of societies where everyone can live in a  
9 peaceful environment. Therefore, the European Students' Union (ESU)  
10 finds the attention given by the European Commission's (EC)  
11 communication on internationalisation important and appropriate, as this  
12 topic is among the most important to be addressed. Throughout the  
13 communication, however, there is no clear understanding if higher  
14 education institutions (HEIs) from other continents are a threat or  
15 possible partners. What is more, more emphasis should be placed on the  
16 need for balanced mobility and therefore EU students' mobility outside of  
17 the Union.

18

19 ESU strongly supports the EC's emphasis on an increasingly student-  
20 centred approach to education, however we encourage the EC to  
21 recognise the vital importance of interaction between academic staff and  
22 students. Higher education plays a leading role in democratic  
23 development and internationalisation provides space for advancing  
24 democracy around the world. In this context, ESU encourages the EC to  
25 treat internationalisation as an opportunity for cooperation,  
26 development, and mutual benefit, rather than competition.

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28 The presence of international students on a given campus, in and of itself,  
29 greatly benefits the quality of education for all others physically  
30 proximate. In this light, just as it should be certain that no higher  
31 education institution sees national students as a source of revenue,  
32 international students should not be seen as an income source for higher  
33 education institutions.

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35 Student support systems must be available to international students. Just  
36 as with national students, international students with special needs  
37 should be provided with access to the required services (e.g. health care,  
38 child care) regardless of the length of stay. As financing remains a barrier  
39 to mobility, governments should ensure the accessibility and portability  
40 of financial study support. Furthermore, scholarships should be offered to  
41 students coming from non-EU countries, and to students coming from  
42 countries that are not committed to sufficiently funding their higher  
43 education system – and consequently their future. The host country  
44 should encourage the use of the knowledge gained by students for its  
45 further spread and mutual benefit including in their country of origin.

46  
47 Steps need to be taken to remove barriers to granting of visas for mobile  
48 students. Furthermore, non-EU students should have also the opportunity  
49 to stay for long term mobility programs and the visas granted need to  
50 provide the opportunity to be employed in the hosting country.

51 ESU believes increased attention should to be paid to the implementation  
52 of recognition mechanisms. Extra assistance should be given to the  
53 European Higher Education Area countries, where implementation of the  
54 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, for example, is still  
55 unbalanced. ESU also encourages a debate on the establishment of  
56 minimum standards in the implementation of Bologna Process action  
57 lines that will ensure countries' follow-up on the agreements made to

58 date. The EC's attempt to spread the use of the EHEA transparency and  
59 recognition instruments may have a positive impact.

60

61 The high levels of youth unemployment have led to a spike in youth  
62 emigration in the past years. This is particularly prevalent in some NUS  
63 countries. The residency requirement for recent emigrants who return to  
64 their home country and wish to pursue higher education there, should be  
65 considered in this context for the purposes of admissions policies and  
66 student supports.

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68 Fair treatments for migrant students should also be considered, with  
69 flexible arrangements for students who acquire full citizenship during the  
70 term of their college course, and access to student supports. This can be  
71 done through the fast-tracking of citizenship applications and ensuring a  
72 mechanism to re-evaluate any status, determined upon admission is in  
73 place.

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75 We must strive for greater clarity and consistency across higher education  
76 institutions for international students towards a fairer and more uniform  
77 approach.

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79 ESU sees as positive the EC's continued support for staff mobility. This  
80 assists in increasing the quality of higher education. However, even  
81 though ESU supports the EC's internationalisation at home concept  
82 development, we believe mobility is a right, and wish the EC was more  
83 ambitious in developing this matter.

84

85 Multilingualism is one of the greatest European cultural assets. Thus,  
86 language courses for international degree-seeking students must be  
87 provided to such an extent that will enable their full participation in  
88 society. What is more, using online and open access elements as a

89 supplement to formal higher education plays a role as an additional  
90 learning instrument in the internationalised environment; therefore,  
91 provided that online elements are not used to simply replace traditional  
92 educational methods, ESU supports the EC's position on this point.

93  
94 ESU expresses its support for the further development of transnational  
95 joint degrees, however tuition fees in these programmes are just as  
96 harmful as in traditional programmes. ESU believes that quality assurance  
97 agencies in the countries involved in managing transnational joint  
98 programmes should cooperate on the quality assurance of those, which  
99 will also result in the additional benefit of increased cooperation and  
100 experience sharing between quality assurance agencies.

101  
102 Cooperation between higher education institutions and businesses can be  
103 fruitful for institutions and programmes, for example for students gaining  
104 practical experience and for new developments in the working fields to  
105 be implemented in the curricula. Businesses should only have a guiding  
106 role and the cooperation must never reduce the level of student  
107 representation and influence on the decision-making in the higher  
108 education institutions.

109  
110 In conclusion, ESU emphasises that students, as the key stakeholders in  
111 higher education, must be a part of the decision-making when designing  
112 national and institutional strategies for internationalisation. We  
113 appreciate that the EC considers students as such, as the topic of  
114 internationalisation is highly important to us. Thus, ESU is committed to  
115 further work on the implementation of internationalisation strategies in  
116 Europe, as are our member national unions in their countries. We look  
117 forward to further and deeper cooperation with the EC and other  
118 stakeholders in this work.