Students must be heard, education must be funded

The European Students' Union (ESU) and Fédération des Associations Générales d'Étudiants (FAGE)'s statement on the student protests in France

The European Students' Union (ESU) and Fédération des Associations Générales d'Étudiants (FAGE) stand in solidarity with students mobilising across France for adequate investment in education, decent study conditions and a future in which access to quality education is guaranteed to all.

The mobilisation, which began in secondary schools in the Paris region in September, has rapidly developed into a nationwide movement and has now spread significantly into higher education. In recent days, mobilisation has expanded across French higher education institutions, demonstrating that many of the concerns first raised by secondary school students are shared throughout the educational system. **The movement now represents the biggest youth strike in France since May of 1968**, with over 450,000 people taking to the street.

French higher education is facing sustained pressure from insufficient funding and resources. Higher education institutions must be able to provide quality education and support students throughout their studies, without financial circumstances becoming a barrier to access or completion. FAGE has called for these priorities to be reflected concretely in the 2027 state budget, including investment in higher education and research, adequate staffing and facilities and measures supporting students with their living costs.

ESU and FAGE are appalled by the response to the mobilisation and strongly condemn the growing number of injuries and arrests among protesting youth. According to the French Ministry of Justice, by 5 October, 5,060 people had been placed in police custody in connection with incidents surrounding the protests, while 1,802 people were subject to prosecution. The French Education Minister had reported more than 200 students injured since the mobilisation began, alongside

injuries among education staff and law enforcement officers. The sheer scale of violence against protesters is laid bare by reports of minors suffering severed hands, double jaw fractures and other gruesome injuries. The scale of these incidents is particularly concerning given that many of those participating are minors and young people. Concerns about the policing of young people in France have also previously been raised by the **Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)**, which has called attention to the use of police force against young people and supported calls for stronger safeguards and accountability. As the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights has previously underlined in relation to demonstrations in France, **isolated acts of violence do not remove the rights of peaceful demonstrators** and require authorities to facilitate peaceful assemblies and ensure that any use of force is necessary, proportionate and aimed at minimising harm.

The response of public authorities to the mobilisation must be a systemic one. Students must be recognised as legitimate partners in the political response, with their demands addressed through meaningful dialogue followed by concrete decisions.

ESU and FAGE stand in solidarity with the demonstrations in France and the students and youth currently taking to the streets and call on the French authorities to engage in meaningful dialogue with students, uphold the right to peaceful protest and respond to the demands behind the mobilisation with concrete measures.