

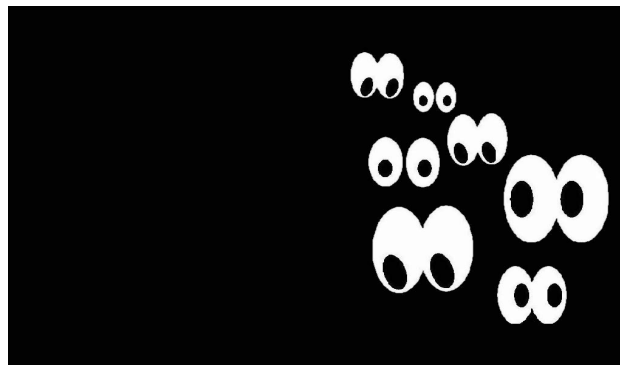
London, 7 February, 2007

Speech Koen Geven, Mobility Seminar

Dear Participants,

As a start, I would like to thank Education International and the Universities and College Union for doing such an outstanding job in organising this conference. While the project is part of a cooperation between ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe, most of the work for this conference has been done by EI and UCU, for which I would like to thank them deeply.

In the past weeks, I have been deliberating on the topic of mobility of students with several of my colleagues and friends. While discussing, we found out that the issues we are discussing should be presented in a very visual form. We know the problems relating to mobility, but when we take stock of the steps that have been taken to realise mobility, it is not surprising that we haven't achieved our noble goal – realising mobility for staff and students. In fact, mobility for most staff and students is far from being a reality. Let me show you which pictures my fellow students associate with this topic.



First of all, we are in the dark. What do we really know about mobility? The studies ESIB and EI have carried out on this topic clearly show the lack of research on this topic. How many students are mobile outside an Erasmus programme? What are the costs that students face while being mobile? What is the socio-economic background of the mobile student? The Bologna working group on data collection, which was charged with finding background information on mobile students and staff, has only achieved one goal: identifying the holes in our data, identifying where we still have to find answers and proposing an action plan to find these data. But its mandate hasn't been fully achieved: there are still no good figures on mobility. It is needless to say, that finding this information is essential for the creation of good policy: without sound data, we can't make sound policy.

But even though we don't have quantitative data, students have other associations with mobility. The second association, we have is the the problem of finances.



Being mobile means opening your savings account. The amount of money that a student needs to put on the table to become mobile still greatly exceeds the funds that might be available. In many cases, money is not available at all, for example for non-EU students that want to study in the EU, or vice versa. Therefore, financial obstacles remain the major obstacle to become mobile. If we want to make mobility a reality for all students and not just a small elite, financial obstacles must be overcome. Governments must put money where their mouth is.

Finally, I am showing a picture that might be familiar to many of you. It effectively shows how Europe is being seen by many students who want to study here.



If we want students to have more possibilities to go and study abroad, we must break through fortress Europe. Special visa procedures are urgently needed for every student that wants to study in the European Union. It is interesting to note that a small hole in this fortress has just been breached. Many Belarusian students that were expelled, now have the possibility to continue their studies abroad, thanks to many of you here. Special visa procedures have been set up, and they often receive a generous grant. However, we must realise this also for students which are not forced to study abroad because of political reasons. Mobility benefits the entire European society, but it must become a reality to all. That is why we are organising this conference.

On behalf of European students, I wish you all a good event, thank you for your attention.