**Comments received on Eurostudent’s concept proposal for the establishment of a European Observatory on Social Dimension of Higher Education (EOSDHE):**

**European Commission** - Lene Oftedal

Suggested - Erasmus centralised action, multilateral projects, priority 2 – Social Dimension (deadline 02.02.2012) as a possibility to fund EOSDHE

**BUSINESSEUROPE** - Henning Dettleff

I read through the outline of a Social Dimension Observatory and found the proposal sensible if the following principles are adhered to:

* I welcome the approach to base future actions on a thorough analysis of the existing systems, a comparison among them and the definition of good/best practice. Empirically grounded, reforms of national systems will certainly be much more effective.
* It is better to combine the observatory with existing structures (EUROSTUDENT) than to create new ones. We should not establish another secretariat for that purpose.
* There should be an added value of all activities undertaken for the national systems. Thus, countries that make use of the possibility of evaluation should pay at full cost for that service.

**European Students’ Union** comment for the proposal for the establishment of a European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (EOSDHE)

The European Students’ Union is strongly in favor to create a European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education. The actual situation of the social dimension in Europe is more than distressing which is why the implementation of the Observatory is a vital step in ensuring that there is development of the social dimension and that problems are recognized, addressed and dealt with.

Given the actual political situation of the social dimension, ESU would like to emphasize that the process of developing the Observatory in the long run should be given attention to. It is a logical step to start with the monitoring, examining and collecting and sharing of good practices like it is written in the given draft. Nevertheless these should be seen as first steps. On a long run the Observatory should develop into a more active body, which doesn’t only give its expertise upon request or function as a information sharing point but takes a proactive approach in for example creating policy suggestions, whether in cooperation with other networks or stakeholders or on its own.

When it comes to the monitoring of the relevant aspects of the social dimension, it would make sense for the Observatory to engage in giving recommendations to member states on improvement points whether a peer review is requested or not, as this would be a natural continuation on the work as the Observatory would already be examining how countries collect and analyse their own data on inequalities of participation in higher education.

ESU would like to stress the role of the students in the coordination and involvement of the Observatory, as students are the key players when we talk about social dimension. Students, or rather the potential students, are the ones who are directly influenced by the developments and decisions made concerning the national action plans and strategies on social dimension. Students are the central actors in higher education as they are whom HE exists for making them the experts of knowing what is needed and important. What is more, students were on the forefront in promoting the idea of the social dimension as an integral part of the Bologna Process. To ensure that the voice of students is also given in the future, we would like to see the European Students’ Union as a part of the coordination of the Observatory and if at some point country peer reviews are done, a part of the review teams.

To reach the realization of the Observatory, it is essential that all supporters of this idea work together. If needed, developing a strategy or planning and agreeing on further steps to convince the political institutions and relevant stakeholders on the need of realizing such a body should be worked on. ESU acknowledges that proving the validity of the Observatory isn’t a simple matter, as this topic area has to do with national competences and in the end everything that concerns social affairs is linked to financial capacities. Therefore it is crucial to find a financing structure to show the sustainability of such an Observatory, both for short term as well as for long term.

In order to show the validity of the Observatory to a wider audience, it is necessary to develop the reasoning for the Observatory further. In ESU’s opinion it is not enough to refer to the aims of the different communiqués and the Council Conclusions only. Clarifying the benefits the Observatory for different stakeholders would promote the Observatory in a systematic manner as the different political institutions and stakeholders would recognize what they would gain from such a body and why is it relevant. Another issue to solve is who could take the role of the Project Director, as it was previously discussed that the Project Coordinator would work as a part the coordination team of Eurostudent. Since now the financing of Eurostudent is not certain, it is important to make sure that a solution for this is found soon.

The data collecting and sharing is already a fundamental part of the Observatory draft, but there is still a need to gather new data, as far as there is still a lack of comparable data in the Bologna countries and the data ascertainment is vulnerable, like the financing situation of the Eurostudent report shows. ESU would like to open up the discussion on seeking a possible solution to this by including the Observatory in the data collecting thus creating a possibility to get financing for the Observatory.