



EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

PRESS RELEASE

“For Global Competition Europe’s Higher Education Institutions Need Excellent Student Services”

(Berlin, June 12 2007) Europe can expand its leading position as the world’s most attractive region for studying only if the so called student services – accommodation, meal services, information, counselling, career services, child care – are strengthened and if especially the HEI use the student services, besides teaching and research, to sharpen their profile. More than 100 experts from HEI and from student service organisations from 20 countries and four continents reached this conclusion at the first international Student Services conference taking place in Berlin. The Deutsches Studentenwerk (DSW) and the „European Council for Student Affairs“ (ECStA) were hosting the two-days conference sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) during Germany’s EU-Presidency. “For global competition Europe’s Higher Education Institutions need excellent student services; they can make the decisive difference”, the Secretary General of the DSW, Achim Meyer auf der Heyde, said; he also holds the presidency of the ECStA.

He referred to the ambitious aim to make the European Union the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge-based economic area of the world by 2010. It is not sufficient to place university education alone on the political agenda. Of the same importance is the accompanying social and economic infrastructure at European HEI because this enables young people to take up a course of study and to be mobile in Europe, regardless of their origin – and it offers also students from non European countries the standards they are used to”, Meyer auf der Heyde explained.

The European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Ján Figel, emphasized in Berlin: “Excellency in higher education cannot be achieved as long as the students’ socio-economic background creates a barrier.” Peter Greisler of the BMBF considered the student services a “guarantee for student mobility”. To improve students’ mobility in Europe, Dr. Christian Bode, Secretary General of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), amongst other demanded more affordable accommodation and that social contacts between international students and their fellow students from Germany should be improved. Several experts confirmed that financial problems still prevent students from going abroad.

“There is too little of everything: mobility, accommodation, social contacts, money – this shows the importance of a strong social and economic infrastructure even within Europe”, ECStA-President Meyer auf der Heyde concluded. “This infrastructure becomes even more important when we consider the needs of students coming from

non European countries. Not only do they expect good teaching but also intensive pastoral care and support, something they know from their home countries.”

Speakers from different countries showed the diversity of student services worldwide. Professor Dr Tan Teck Koon of the National University of Singapore (NUS) presented the “student centred” approach of NUS, which aims especially at a strong emotional attachment of students to their university. Ulla-Mari Karhu of the Finnish Student Housing Organisation reported about the project to set up a hall of residence for Finnish students in St. Petersburg in Russia as part of a Finnish-Russian cultural exchange. Gert Christens from Antwerp presented a Belgian project which offers immediate help to students with psychological problems. Pierre Richter of the umbrella organisation for student services in France CNOUS (Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires) spoke about the latest trends in food services, and Dr Rudolf Pörtner, CEO of the Studentenwerk Dresden, presented the new Campus Office “uni & child”, a joint venture with the Technical University Dresden.

Professor Dr Kokichi Shoji, President of the Japanese „National Federation of University Co-operative Associations“, outlined the wide offer of student services in Japan, which also includes bookshops, computer and travel agencies for students. Dr Georg Schütte, Secretary General of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, introduced the so called Welcome centres for internationally mobile students in Germany.

Bernd Wächter of the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) stressed the importance of internationally comparable student services to enhance Europe’s attractiveness as a study destination, compared to the USA for instance. ACA concludes from complex surveys with students from non European countries, especially from India and China: Europe has a good reputation as a place to study, for instance because of its rich history and cultural diversity, and the access to higher education in Europe is positively rated. The USA however lead clearly regarding the so called hard criterias like quality of education, value of degrees and jobs prospects – and especially with the infrastructure of the course of studies. “For us in Europe, this has to be the starting point in order to raise the standard to an international level”, Meyer auf der Heyde summed up.

Background information: ECStA, European Council for Student Affairs

This independent European umbrella organization is aiming to promote the social and economic infrastructure at all higher education insitutions of Europe. 18 organisations from 14 different European countries are belonging to the ECStA, among them the DSW as the umbrella organisation of the 58 Studentenwerke in Germany or the umbrella organisation for student services in France CNOUS. Recently organisations from Greece, Estonia and Switzerland joined the ECStA. The ECStA looks after 10 million students all over Europe.

Further information: www.ecsta.org/sam/

Contact: Stefan Grob, Deutsches Studentenwerk, Tel. 030/29 77 27 20, Mobil 0163 29 77 272, E-Mail: stefan.grob@studentenwerke.de