

7 January 2010, Brussels

Dear participant to the ESNtrain,

In the course of 2008 or 2009, you registered for the ESNtrain. This communication platform was supposed to let us travel throughout Europe, meet fantastic people and experience a unique adventure.

When ÖBB stopped the train in its tracks on March 28th, 2009, we were consternated and deeply disappointed, like you possibly were.

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) believed that the project was a great idea. It lent its name to it, and gave access to its network of hundreds of volunteers, who worked preparing your arrival in their city. While the project was organized by platform GmbH – a separate Swiss company – ESN also promoted it through its sections to the general public and particularly to exchange students. That is perhaps how you heard first about the train. Since you shared our enthusiasm for this train prior to its planned departure, we want to share with you today our thoughts about the ESNtrain.

Since the cancellation, more than 9 months have passed. Some dust has settled, while some other aspects remain to us as unclear as they were just after the cancellation.

The organizer of the ESNtrain - platform GmbH - and its railway partner - the Austrian railway company ÖBB - have now engaged into legal proceedings. As you could read in the email that it sent you on November 6th, 2009, platform GmbH is claiming from ÖBB the money it lost in the ESNtrain cancellation. Once it has achieved this, platform GmbH says that it intends to reimburse you the amount you paid for your ESNtrain journey.

We at ESN believe that this lawsuit will take years to come to an end. It may take a shorter time if the involved parties reach a settlement, but still several months. Moreover, as in every lawsuit, there is a risk for the claimant to lose part or all of their case.

In summary, we believe that you will need to wait at least for months before platform GmbH reimburses your money, in full or possibly in part only. We are aware that what we just wrote is hard to hear. Some of us in the sections, at the national level and in the International Board of ESN were also supposed to travel on the ESNtrain, along with you. Likewise, we are waiting for our money and feel your frustration and disappointment.

Like many of us, you may ask yourself how come the ESNtrain got cancelled as late as on the day before it was supposed to start, fully loaded at a Bratislava train station, and with dozens of participants already in town. As of today, no clear answer has emerged. We met both the CEO of platform GmbH and the responsible manager at ÖBB. Both offered a different version of cancellation's cause. Both declined our request to see documents demonstrating their claims, such as contracts, books and correspondence. Both agreed to show these documents only before a judge.


Like for the reimbursement of your money, we believe that it will take months or years before we see clearer what happened in the days and weeks preceding March 28th, 2009.

The aftermath of the ESNtrain cancellation was a difficult moment for many of us in ESN, like it probably was for you as well. Some ESN sections made the best of the situation and organized local activities under the motto ESNyway. Furthermore, we do not want to let these hardships be in vain. As a fast-growing network of more than 300 sections spread over Europe, we want to learn to better manage large partnerships, such as the ESNtrain. This is the reason why we intend to analyze how ESN has handled the ESNtrain project and draw recommendations for the future, let them be new structures, guidelines or lesson learnt. We want to

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make the resulting report public at our next annual general meeting in April 2010.

Right after the ESNtrain cancellation, ESN has created a so-called Care Team. If you have any question related to the ESN's relation to the ESNtrain, or if you want to share your feelings or thoughts about it, feel free to send us email at care_team@esn.org. Before you do, please check our FAQ under www.esn.org/esntrain_faq.

In the meantime, we want every ESNtrain participant to receive our letter. Since platform GmbH cannot give us the list of participants due to personal data protection reasons, we are left to our own devices to reach you. Feel free to forward this letter to other participants you may know and to publish it on the internet, as long as you keep its integrity.

Best regards,



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