

## **Reaction of the Erasmus Student Network on the future rules on the entry and residence of non-EU national researchers, students, school pupils, unremunerated trainees and volunteers in the EU,**

### **Public Consultation, August 2012**

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is one of the biggest interdisciplinary student associations in Europe. ESN is currently active in 36 countries including countries outside of the European Union. ESN provides its services to international students irrespective of their home country or home institution. Thus, the consultation is of great interest for ESN and ESN warmly welcomes the discussion. We will in the following share our experiences, concerns and recommendations.

On a general note, ESN believes that student mobility is not only beneficial when happening within Europe's borders but all ingoing and outgoing international students add value to society. In addition, education is one of the most effective forms of development cooperation for third countries that are still in the process of reaching the standard of living enjoyed in European countries. We thus believe that future entry and residence rules should not be overly complicated, time-consuming, and costly and as a result prevent the entry or stay of third-country nationals.

### **Problems for students needing Visas**

Students from third countries applying for studies in the EU often already go through a very thorough administrative and academic screening by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) they are applying to and/or the organisation in charge of the scholarship. The Visa application is a repetition of the whole administrative process. Students often need to travel various times to the other side of their country or even to another country if no embassy of the respective host country is located in the country.

Apart from the travel costs, Visas can be costly itself (sometimes up to 300 US dollars). If these Visa costs are covered by a scholarship, they are usually not pre-financed and only reimbursed upon arrival. The aforementioned procedures clearly limit the access to studying abroad.

In addition, the procedures are often not very transparent and take too long. This can prevent a study abroad experience altogether if the necessary documents are not ready at the beginning of the studies.

## Solutions and Recommendations

1. ESN recommends stronger involvement of HEIs and better cooperation with embassies. Embassies should put more trust in their HEIs. A possible solution is a list of selected students provided by the HEI to the embassy which should in principle suffice to obtain a Visa quickly with at most one visit to the embassy.
2. The administrative fees of student, school pupil, volunteer and trainee Visas should be minimal and ideally waived.
3. Scholarship providers should take into account the total costs of obtaining a Visa (including travels and fees) and pre-finance those costs.
4. It should be possible to submit Visa applications online and it should only be necessary to visit the embassy for some significant reason - such as a Visa interview if this is deemed necessary.
5. Ideally, Visa rules and regulations should be simple, fast and uniform across Europe and aim to facilitate the entry of students, not prevent it.