



fzs | Wöhlertstraße 19 | 10115 Berlin

November 17th: Common statement from the TOPICS Network

Topics is a network bringing together progressive national students' union (or national students union with progressive ground positions), from Austria (ÖH), Belgium (FEF), France (UNEF), Germany (fzs), Italy (UDU), Luxembourg (UNEL) and Switzerland (VSS-UNES-USU).

November, 17th is the International Students' Day, commemorating the repression of Czech students in Prague by the Nazi forces, and the subsequent closing of the Universities by the regime. From then on, each year, the day is commemorated by students' unions around the world. It is the moment to highlight the current state of higher education and to put forward the fights students are still leading today.

Over the last decades, higher education institutions across Europe have become more attractive and welcome a growing population of students. Despite the apparent growth of the student population, measures taken by many European governments threaten the accessibility and the quality of higher education.

Instead of funding public higher education to allow a whole generation to have access to qualifications, emancipation through knowledge, to share and to discover cultures, many governments choose to close the doors of higher education. Removing free access to public higher education as in France or reducing it as in Belgium and Italy, denies that access to knowledge is a fundamental right. Raising tuition fees from years to years as it happens in Italy and introducing or doubling them in Germany and in Austria for foreign non-EU students, is putting financial barriers in front of our right to self-determination and our possibilities to shape our own future. As the cost of living is rising, lowering or refusing to improve financial and material support for students is amplifying a social based discrimination in Higher Education and society. The results of the liberal policies that affected the whole population have created the conditions for the rise of far right ideas which are spreading throughout Europe. We need to counter these dangers to ensure academic freedom and a free and accessible education.

The TOPICS network is alarmed by the current situation of higher education and puts forward its demands. Higher Education should be and remain accessible to those who have the will to enter them, meaning that entrance examinations or any form of selection at the start or during the studies are excluding and segregating students from higher education. For TOPICS network, accessibility therefore means that students are having the financial means to pursue their studies, which includes public grants, any type of social support and the absence of tuition fees are at the core of this concept. We also strongly believe in equality among all students: that is why we demand the elimination of all the barriers and discriminations against foreign students, including the non-EU citizens whether they are of financial nature, or of any other kind.

For all these reasons, TOPICS network demands strong measures:

- The improvement of students financial and material support
- The abolishment of tuition fees
- The removal of all forms of selection in public higher education

freier Zusammenschluss von
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