E.U. Students Gain From Open Borders, but Some Host Nations See Burden

By CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE Published: January 29, 2012

PARIS — When the Dutch education minister suggested late last year that Germany might be asked to reimburse the Dutch government for the cost of the many German students that study there, the news resonated in other European countries that host large number of foreign European students.



The suggestion, issued by Education Minister Halbe Zijlstra in a letter to Parliament, comes as Austria has been debating how to finance its own foreign students, who come to take advantage of its quality institutions, its relatively low academic barriers of entry and, of course, its state-paid tuition. "If we want to keep European mobility in the coming years we need to find a financial



solution," Gabriele Burgstaller, the state president of Salzburg, said in an interview by telephone last week. Under European Union guidelines, these cross-border students pay the same low tuition

fees as native students - or in the case of Austria and some other nations, nothing at all leaving governments to subsidize the education of other European countries' students. While experts say that such a free cross-border exchange of students is also beneficial to

host countries, they agree that the real strength of the European Union policy rests on reciprocity. "It's about making mobility a more two-way street," said Sander van den Eijnden, director

general of Nuffic, a Dutch non-profit organization that promotes international

cooperation for higher education. "It's not about one-way streets and then introducing a compensation mechanism. It's

about creating a circulation of students," Mr. van den Eijnden said. Though 24,000 German students study in the Netherlands and another roughly 25,000 in

Austria, Germany itself actually educates more foreign students than the number of

spokesman of the German Education Ministry.

German students abroad. "Overall, Germany's student exchange balance sheet is positive," said Ferdinand Knauss, a

Peter Stegelmann, who runs EDU-CON, a consultancy that helps attract German students to Dutch universities, dismissed the Dutch proposal as just a passing suggestion.

According to Mr. Stegelmann, the Netherlands profits from the many highly educated

Germans who stay and work in the country after their studies. He suggests that the money German students who live in the Netherlands bring to the economy helps to offset the €90 million that the Dutch government says it spends on training German students. Ms. Burgstaller would like a European-wide reimbursement system that would see

countries pay for the cost of educating their own students, no matter where they study

within the European Union. The financial solution should not be "a narrow-minded quota system, nor show resentment toward other countries," she said. "It should simply be a financial solution." An agreement among Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland shows how

The agreement, signed in 1996 by members of the Nordic Council, a working group comprised of the Scandinavian countries and Finland, stipulates that governments

transfer payments between European Union countries might work.

responsibility of the host country.

it would not coordinate such agreements.

said. "It is a very good thing to encourage student mobility."

subsidized.

reimburse 22,000 Danish kroner, or \$3,890, per student each year to other Nordic countries training that student. Though this amount represents just a fraction of the cost of more expensive university programs, it does acknowledge that training foreign students should not be the sole

"It is a way for our countries to show good faith, to make sure our students are welcomed in other Nordic countries," said Jens Peter Jacobsen, director general of the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalization at the Danish Ministry of Science,

Innovation and Higher Education. Another system of transfer payments can be found in the Britain, where devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland decide how to allocate funds after the British treasury transfers a bulk sum. In Scotland, Scottish students are fully

"Universities will look to the government for funding, not to the individual student," said Stephen Crowe, a spokesman for the Scottish Funding Council.

British students from outside Scotland, however, will, starting next year, pay hefty tuition fees of up to £9,000, as set by the individual universities and colleges.

Similarly, students from Wales and Northern Ireland benefit from policies enacted by their countries' governments and paid by the British treasury.

As a result of European Union agreements on higher education, non-British European Union students in Britain might pay far less than a transfer student from another country within Britain, as soon as the new tuition rules go into effect in the next academic year.

Officials at the European Commission on Education and Training say the commission is not against bilateral agreements that would allow reimbursement as long as they were reciprocal and voluntary. However, a spokesman for the commission, Dennis Abbott, said

"Freedom of movement is a in important element of the European Union," Mr. Abbott