

Europeanization in higher education

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Abstract

Johan Olsen, a well known expert on higher education, asked the following question: "Is Europeanization as disappointing a term as it is fashionable? Should it be abandoned or is it useful for understanding European transformations? It is our assessment that the concept of Europeanization is rather useful, despite being occasionally vague. In fact, its vagueness contributes to the flexibility which the EU member states want to maintain, while they try to achieve common goals through coordination and a process free from regulation and supranational decision-making.

The freedom, autonomy and diversity of European higher education have helped the development of one of the most successful and the best-performing systems of higher education worldwide. In only three years, there will be a European Higher Education Area. Present day achievements in higher education are the building blocks of tomorrow's common EHEA. Europeanization is paving the way, we should maintain it and continue with it.

Keywords: *higher education, europeanization, diversity, education.*

1. Europeanization can be defined as a process by which member states of the European Union (EU) retain much of their independence, while evolving from their different starting points towards uniform policies and structures, using the EU as a tool to help this process gain speed. (Alex Warleigh: European Union – the basics, p. 124). It is also a process by which EU members learn from each other and coordinate their policies without EU regulation or the transfer of new competences to Brussels. The term “fusion” is also used to indicate the unification of policies without any obligation to do so.

2. It is also said that the process of europeanization – as a search for unity of European educational models -- started much earlier than the EU itself, even in the 19th and the 20th century. European universities have common traditions, as do universities in general. After World War II, the tendency in Europe was to get closer to the American, global model, a process that can also be called Americanization and, to a certain degree, globalization. The American model is based on the universal character of universities, which are to teach arts and sciences and the values of humanity as a whole rather than serve as national institutions of individual nations. The American universities are, by definition, international. The idea of the student participation in the governance of universities developed in the mid 20th century in both Europe and America.

3. Education is not an area of European Union competence. Yet it is an area of growing EU interest, at least since the Treaty of Maastricht. The Council of Ministers of Education has come up with many important initiatives and has proposed reforms and transformations which have been applied by most states, thus bringing the educational systems closer together.

4. The Bologna process, without being an EU process, has organized the coordination of a large number of universities and national governments of Europe, basically creating new education standards, policies and strategies of development. After the Magna Charta

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Universitatum (The Great Charter of the Universities), adopted by the rectors of European universities in Bologna on September 18, 1988, higher education in Europe was not going to be the same. EU style europeanization is simply not possible any more without reference to the Bologna process and its goals.

5. The object of this paper is to look at the EU process of europeanization, as “work in progress” at the EU level, and at the situation in the Republic of Macedonia in terms of present and future application of that process.

The EU education policy

6. EU education policy has been relatively less ambitious in this field than in such fields as agriculture, competition, or monetary policy, to name just a few. This, however, has been the will of the member states. The Treaty of Rome (Art. 149) limits EU education policy to:

“a contribution to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member states and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the member states for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.”

7. In the 70's, a new “mixed formula” of decision-making within the EU was invented, i.e. a resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council. (See more on this in: Heiko Walkenhorst “The German Education System and Europeanization”,

2005). This formula retains full national sovereignty with very little (if any) participation of the supranational structure (i.e. the Commission). This kind of resolution is not obligatory and can be considered to be the so-called “soft law.” If the states decide to apply this kind of “soft law” – it is of their free will (unlike the regulations that may be called “hard law,” enforceable within the whole EU territory).

8. Since the 70’s, “soft-law” includes, inter alia, “education with European contents” (1978) and the “European dimension in education” (1988). (See: Council of the European Communities, European Educational Policy Statements, 1988).

9. The EU member states, as well as the EU institutions, support the creation of a European Area of Education by 2010 within the Bologna process. Bologna is a result of the work of European universities and European governments (outside the EU), not an imposition from above. There is simply no EU model of education, while the Bologna process is building one. The EU provides information on the educational systems of member states and their compatibility (through the EURYDICE system / EURYBASE, prepared by the Directorate General of Education and Culture). Most EU countries are constantly reforming their educational systems, making them more compatible with those of other EU countries and, at the same time, with the American / global system. The approach is to make one’s own system more competitive and attractive internationally and make it possible for all European diplomas to be based on equal quality of education – transferable within the EU as a whole.

10. The inability to speak other languages poses a barrier to the free movement of people (John McCormick, *Understanding the EU*, p. 143), and even more to study in a foreign country. This problem has pushed europeanization in the direction of studying more languages, starting with English (even in primary schools) or French. The EU formula is to recommend the study of one’s own + at least two other EU languages by every European citizen. There are higher education programs in several countries offering academic programs in a number of world languages. Maintaining and developing linguistic diversity is one of the goals of the EU (in 2007, there is for the first time a European Commissioner for multilingualism).

11. The European dimension consists mainly of teaching about European integration, EU institutions, European Law, history, geography, culture, etc. This kind of study within higher education curricula, helps to develop both European consciousness and European citizenship. Exchanges of students and teachers, European seminars, conferences, the work of INGO', and study abroad, are all necessary steps in Europeanization and are to be further developed.

12. "We recognize that mobility of students and staff among all participating countries remains one of the key objectives of the Bologna process." (Bergen Conference Communiqué, The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals, 2005, p.4). The EU was a full participant of the Bergen conference, together with 45 European countries. The EU contribution in the field of mobility is remarkable. The ERASMUS program, started 20 years ago in 1987, is one of the best examples in this field. It makes a great contribution to the mobility of students and teachers within the EU. Today, the ERASMUS program is a part of the EU Lifelong Learning Program (2007-13). Approximately 1.4 million students and teachers from 31 countries have participated so far, as have some 2199 institutions of higher learning. According to the EU Commission, in the academic year 2004/5, some 150,000 students took part (Le Monde, November 15, 2006). The main countries receiving European students and teachers were:

Spain 25, 511

France 20, 529

Germany 17, 273

Most students and teachers came

from: Germany 22, 427

France 21, 561

Spain 20, 819

In addition to the Erasmus program, there is also a LEONARDO program (for high school students), TEMPUS program (for university teachers and researchers) and other programs.

These programs are open to candidate countries' participation. Bulgaria, for instance, started its participation while still a candidate country (with 179 students received, 779 sent abroad in 2004/05).

Turkey has been a participant too (with 299 students received and 1142 sent during the same period). European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries have been participating as well.

13. In terms of governance, we should look into the work of the Glasgow meeting of the European University Association (EUA / "Strong University for a Strong Europe"), held in 2005 in preparation of the Bergen (Bologna process) meeting. The EUA emphasized the importance of university governance and of its adjustment to today's realities. Among the conclusions:

a) More autonomy, less regulation: Universities should make more choices on their own;

b) University governments are to be more proactive and more accountable, their strategic plans, better defined and clearer;

c) Universities will have to be governed within the right level of decentralization, close to a federal model;

d) The number of university bodies needed to run each institution should be reduced, leaders should have power to make real decisions, each level of government reporting to a higher one (vertical level), each level consulting other actors (on a horizontal level);

e) Academic staff with good managerial skills should be made leaders; leaders are to be able to consult experts before making decisions.

Those and similar requirements are related to the creation and development of KNOWLEDGE based societies, a process in which universities are in the lead, and which implies that the universities should draw on increased resources and adequate funding.

(Most information here derives from the presentation by Luc Weber of the EUA / University of Geneva, at the Glasgow meeting).

The main assumption here is that universities are to remain pluralistic / democratic institutions, i.e. not under the political umbrella of any single political party or ideological movement. This requirement is central to American policies in the area of education, although some major universities have moved in the direction of introducing corporate style management instead of, or in addition to, collegial- academic decision-making. Some of the ideas expressed by Luc Weber do correspond to the American model too.

14. Finally, a few words about the European Court of Justice (ECJ) rulings, some of which interpreted existing European law as applicable to education. Based on Art. 6 of the Rome Treaty (on non-discrimination) and Art. 48 (freedom of movement), the ECJ

came up with rules directly applicable in education. In the Kraus decision (Kraus v. Land Baden Wurtemberg, 1993), the ECJ ruled that a citizen of a EU nation who has a university degree from another EU nation, should have his degree fully recognized by his own nation following an administrative check, without payment for that service or an “excessive administrative fee.”

In the Casagrande case (Casagrande v. Landeshauptstadt Munchen, 1974) the ECJ accepted the principle of non-discrimination in education for EU citizens in any member state.

In the Blaizot case (Blaizot et al. v. University of Liege et al., 1986) the ECJ confirmed

the right to equal access to university education for all EC citizens, without payment of registration fees or any additional fees imposed on foreigners.

These rulings will provide a gateway to opening the national systems of future EU members more widely to EU and other European citizens.

Republic of Macedonia and Europeanization

15. Macedonia is one of those European countries which have been participants in the europeanization process for a long time. Macedonia today is in the process of change, pursuant to both European and global trends. The Law on Higher Education of July 25, 2000, which is about to be amended in 2007, represents a good basis for further europeanization, although some additional provisions may be necessary in the short term. Macedonian law has already accepted the new two cycle degree system (4+3 years) – or a three- cycle degree system (3+2+3) with the possibility of intermediate qualifications; the European credit transfer system; quality assurance; the recognition of degrees and study periods (now proposed in a more flexible form). As in the case of other countries, however, not enough is being done about strengthening research and innovation, the importance of research and research training, or the synergy between the future European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA).

16. Additionally, there are aspects of europeanization not really taken into consideration. One such example is the “European dimension of education” or the “European content in higher education curricula.” Some EU members have included those goals in their laws on higher education, trying to encourage European studies in general. In Macedonia, this will be needed sooner or later. European studies here should include regional studies as well (the Balkans area, Eastern Europe). In terms of europeanization, Western Europe should also include the study of the new regions in their European studies.

Europeanization is also a process of exchange, of search for common traditions, of building a sense of a larger community (and its identity). The universities have an enormous role to play in this respect, their teachers to train the teachers of secondary and primary schools.

17. A significant increase in the study of foreign languages in Macedonia, as well as in other countries, is a necessary condition for fuller opening to Europe and to the world.

At present, there are five private universities where teaching is conducted in English.

English is also taught in primary and secondary schools. This is a great contribution to Europeanization, and should be recognized as such. There is also a need for a second world language, most likely French. as a language of instruction in a member country of the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF). Those who will be working in NATO, will need English and French, those in EU, English, French and German. At the same time, knowledge of most other European languages will be needed, including of Russian, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Arabic... Obviously, national language(s) still have priority in every nation, as well as, in some cases, the languages of minorities.

18. University exchanges and the mobility of students, teachers, researchers, and administrators should be encouraged and supported by the Government and by EU institutions. Programs like “ERASMUS” are in the interest not just of individual students but of Macedonia as well. Bilateral exchanges of students and faculty (e.g. Fulbright program and individual exchanges between universities) with the US and other countries need to be further developed. More Macedonian students should study abroad and more foreign students

should study in Macedonia. Foreign teachers should be welcome to compete freely for positions at Macedonian universities – and Macedonian teachers should go to more foreign universities to teach or conduct research. These exchanges should be open equally to state and private universities; private universities should be able to represent Macedonia abroad, within the Bologna process and elsewhere.

In an earlier period, Macedonia had a significant number of foreign students, mainly from the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Macedonia should re-establish contacts with universities in those parts of the world and create and maintain networks of former students (and teachers) many of whom still speak Macedonian. Macedonians who studied in those countries should be encouraged to help in this process, as should those Macedonians who studied in Europe, the US and other developed countries in the world.

19. The ECJ rulings referred to in the EU context are not the law for Macedonia yet, but should be considered as such. Macedonia will have to be prepared to apply them fully, and that can be done sooner rather than later. One of the first steps was the Sobranie's vote on the Changes and Additions to the Law on Higher Education (on April 6, 2007), which simplified the recognition of foreign degrees for Macedonian and foreign citizens. This should be without payment, although the Law does not cover that aspect. It would be a good idea to make these provisions consistent with EU law.

20. The social dimension of the Bologna process is a constituent part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (The Bergen Declaration, p. 4). Quality higher education should be equally accessible to all, independently of social condition. On the other hand, the Social Charter of Maastricht (part of the Maastricht Treaty) is a part of the "acquis communautaire." At a time when even the state universities are introducing payment of tuition for some students (not all of them), there is less attention to the provisions of the Social Charter which protects not only students but teachers and administrators too.

The standard of living of all university actors will ultimately have to be raised to levels closer to those of EU. And all those actors will have to have a greater say in university decisions.

21. Which brings us to university governance, and the observation that its structure may be over-regulated. Such is the case while, at the same time, Europeanization trends call for less regulation and more flexibility in higher education. There are bureaucratic structures within universities and outside too. There is a need to strengthen the autonomy of European universities, and too reduce excessive regulation and control from above. Macedonian law has a good record and good provisions on autonomy. At the same time, there are some old and new agencies which may infringe on that autonomy with their rights and jurisdiction. This aspect should be carefully weighed.

22. For instance, taken alone, the creation of a Board of Accreditation is a positive development. There is also an Agency for Evaluation of Qualifications, and a Registration Commission. There is also increased role by the Ministry and its Education Inspectorate. There are already too many bodies, some of which may be working at cross-purposes. There is also the right of the Board of Accreditation to revoke accreditations of universities “not fulfilling the necessary conditions.” (Art.57 of the proposed amended text of the Law on Higher Education). Some of the new provisions make the system more complex and inconsistent with the rules on autonomy which are part of the same Bill. The role of the Interuniversity conference has been enhanced, as has representation of all universities. The faculties (the schools) are represented at university level and at the inter-university level. All of those issues should be reviewed from point of view of europeanization.

23. There is a need for both a long term and a short term strategy for universities (both public and private), and for similar Government strategies in the field of education. Some of the questions raised above can be solved by the universities only or by the universities and the Government together. Tomorrow, a Macedonian Minister of Education will be a member of the Council of Ministers of Education of the EU, which means that Macedonia should have a developed policy on education not only for the country but for the European Union as well. This implies policy on Europeanization and globalization too, in the context of Bologna and beyond. Importantly, this also implies a need for additional funding of higher education, both public and private.

Conclusion

25. Johan Olsen, a well known expert on higher education, asked the following question: "Is Europeanization as disappointing a term as it is fashionable? Should it be abandoned or is it useful for understanding European transformations? (The Many Faces of Europeanization, "Journal of Common Market Studies" / JCMS, 40/5). It is our assessment that the concept of Europeanization is rather useful, despite being occasionally vague. In fact, its vagueness contributes to the flexibility which the EU member states want to maintain, while they try to achieve common goals through coordination and a process free from regulation and supranational decision-making. The freedom, autonomy and diversity of European higher education have helped the development of one of the most successful and the best-performing systems of higher education worldwide. In only three years, there will be a European Higher Education Area. Present day achievements in higher education are the building blocks of tomorrow's common EHEA. Europeanization is paving the way, it should be maintained and continued.

