



## **Stars or stripes? An analysis of developments in higher education in Europe and the USA, 2000–2010**

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### ***Introduction***

About 400 years ago, in the year 1609, the Dutch set foot on an island called “Mana Hatta,” nowadays better known as Manhattan. Lead by the Brit Henry Hudson, the Dutch East-Indian Company established a town, which they named New Amsterdam. After six decades the Dutch had to give up their colony in favor of England, which resulted in the renaming of New Amsterdam into New York. The influence of the early Dutch settlers today is still visible in the society of New York and of the American society at large. The independent, freethinking and trade-oriented mentality of New Yorkers and Americans can be retrieved in the mentality of the Dutch settlers. In the year 2009, also called “the Hudson year,” 400 years of friendly relations between the United States of America (USA) and the Netherlands are celebrated. Higher education is one of the fields in which the Netherlands and the USA have close ties. The Fulbright-Schuman scholarships are a success story in stimulating Dutch students to study in the USA and vice versa. The higher education system of the USA is worldwide seen as an example.

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Higher education in Europe did not stand still in the past decade. On June 19, 1999, the ministers responsible for education of 29 countries in Europe signed the Bologna Declaration (1999). Building further upon the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), the Bologna Declaration emphasizes the importance of the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. One of the main pillars of the EHEA is the adoption of a system based on three main cycles: bachelor, master, and doctorate. These three cycles were already established in English-speaking countries like the USA and the United Kingdom (UK). The Anglo-Saxon higher-education systems inspired the ministers of education amongst others to make a start with the so-called Bologna Process (or Bologna Accords). The harmonization of the architecture of the European higher-education systems had a large impact on universities in Europe.

The Bologna Process is special because it is organized not by institutions of the European Union (EU) but by the Ministers of Education from 29 European countries, while in 1999 the EU consisted of 15 Member States.

In 2010, 47 countries are participating in the Bologna Process, whereas the EU consists of 27 Member States. Not only is the scope different but also the way of decision making. The European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) are supranational institutions, whereas decision making in the Bologna Process is organized in an intergovernmental, or more precise in an interministerial setting. However, the Bologna Process can be viewed as an example of Europeanization in higher education. In the Europeanization literature there is a difference between Europeanization and “EU-ization” (Bache, 2006: 232). In this sense, Europeanization is broader than EU-ization and stretches beyond the policy making in the European Union. The Bologna Process is, in this perspective, an example of Europeanization, not EU-ization.

The Bologna Process was initiated because the national higher-education systems were far from transparent and comparable. Inspired by Anglo-Saxon systems, where a transparent and comparable higher-education system is in place, the signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration in 1999 aimed to create the EHEA in Europe by 2010. But not only transparency was a goal of the EHEA. The European countries also wanted to make European higher education more attractive to and competitive with the rest of the world.

The central research questions of this article are: (1) What are the major developments in masters and doctorates in the USA and Europe between 2000 and 2010? and (2) Is there Europeanization in higher education? We therefore continue with a brief description of academic thinking on Europeanization and an explanation which definition is used in this article. Subsequently, the main developments in higher education in the USA are outlined, followed by European developments. An analysis whether Europeanization takes place in higher education is presented in the final part of this article.

### ***Europeanization***

In recent years an increasing number of scholars have focused their attention on the little-understood mechanism of Europeanization (Dimitrova and Steunenberg, 2000: 204). Europeanization is a fashionable but contested concept. “Measured by the number of titles using the term, research on Europeanization is an academic growth industry.” (Olsen, 2002: 921) The popularity of

Europeanization as a research topic has resulted in a wide variety of concepts and definitions. The Europeanization literature is in an earlier stage of conceptual development than, for example, theories of European integration (Bulmer and Lequesne, 2002).

Robert Ladrech (1994) was the first scholar that explored the concept of Europeanization. He defined Europeanization on the basis of a case in France as “an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that European Community political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech, 1994: 69). Also for Radaelli (2000), the EU is the central actor: “Europeanization refers to: Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of the EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli, 2000: 3–4).

Other recent work on Europeanization shows more clearance on the question whether Europeanization considers (only) the EU or more than that. In their work *Europeanization: New Research Agendas* Graziano and Vink state that in a broad, encyclopaedic sense, to reduce Europeanization to the “Europe of Brussels” is misleading (Graziano and Vink, 2008: 36). Also, Wallace (2000) argues that the EU is itself a feature of Europeanization, which is a process with longer history and broader geographical coverage than that of the EU. Therefore, in Europeanization literature there is a need to distinguish between Europeanization and “EU-ization” (Bache, 2006: 232).

Following this distinction, Europeanization is broader than EU-ization and stretches beyond the relationships between member states and the EU. A definition of Europeanization in this tradition is formulated by Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001): “The emergence and the development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social institutions associated with the problem solving that formalize interactions among the actors and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules” (Risse *et al.*, 2001: 3). Since major developments in higher education in Europe are, as mentioned in the introduction, not restricted to the member states of the European Union, this article is not restricted to EU-ization.

With the article *The many faces of Europeanization* (2002) Johan Olsen attempts “to create a little more order in a disorderly field of research” (Olsen, 2002: 922). Olsen is not trying to explain or define Europeanization but his question is “how the term can be useful for understanding the dynamics of the evolving European polity,” which is exactly what I want to know in the field of European higher education. Olsen argues that “different conceptions of Europeanization complement, rather than exclude, each other.” He distinguishes five conceptions in a framework of Europeanization, which will be the leading framework in this article (Olsen, 2002: 923-924):

1. Changing Boundary of “Europe;”
2. Developing European-Level Institutions;
3. Domestic Impact of European-Level Institutions;

4. Exporting European Institutions;
5. Political Unification of Europe.

*Changing Boundary of “Europe”*

In the literature “Europe” is used in a variety of ways. Some scholars use “Europe” to indicate the European geographical continent, while others refer with Europe to the EU and its Member States. However, transformations in Europe in the past decades cannot be limited to the EU. Also transnational regimes and institutions besides the EU have managed cross-border relations (Wallace, 2000). Olsen looks at the reasons behind the enlargement of the EU as a casus of the changing boundary of Europe. This reasons vary from a moral imperative, to an historic opportunity to “reunify Europe” after decades of artificial separation.

*Developing European-Level Institutions*

Institutional building efforts at the European level can be seen in the frame of purposeful choice. In this frame actors can choose between different forms of organization and governance. They make a choice on the basis of normative criteria. According to Olsen, “the research challenge is to identify the actors, and the motivations and forces that determine their choices” (Olsen, 2002: 929). An early example of a European-level institution is the Council of Europe. Other examples are the EC and the EP, but also the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Space Agency (ESA).

*Domestic Impact of European-Level Institutions*

The most common conception in the framework of Europeanization is the impact of European-level policies and institutions on national or domestic policies and institutions. The bulk of empirical literature concerns the effect of the European Union on the Member States (Olsen, 2002: 932). Though studied intensively, it remains difficult to isolate European effects and to disentangle “net-effects” of European arrangements from global, national, and subnational sources of change (Olsen, 2002: 937).

*Exporting European Institutions*

After the Second World War, the major European states definitely lost their world hegemony. European norms and institutions were no longer self-evident exported to the rest of the world. Nowadays, Europe works hard on its attractiveness and visibility in many policy areas and political arenas. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU is a clear example. This fourth use of Europeanization means that there is a positive balance between non-European countries “importing” from Europe on the one hand, and European countries “importing” from non-European countries on the other. Europeanization is also the case when “European solutions exert more influence in international forums” (Olsen, 2002: 924).

*Political Unification of Europe*

The fifth and final conception of Europeanization is a political development, which makes Europe a more distinct, coherent, and strong political identity (Olsen, 2002: 940). Internal borders and barriers are fading or removed, while external borders and barriers are strengthened. The fragmented European state system becomes more unified as the boundaries of political space are extended

(Olsen, 2002: 940). Europe has, however, a long history of unsuccessful attempts at unification (Heater, 1992).

### ***Higher Education in the USA, 2000–2010***

The higher-education system of the USA is a complex, comprehensive, and decentralized system. There is a separation in higher education between the undergraduate level and the graduate level. Upwards mobility is a key concept and federal loans and grants are widely used. The USA has a long tradition in private sector influence and international activities in higher education. The recent and influential Spellings Commission report asked for more output clarity, higher efficiency, and to keep the system affordable.

A democratization development in graduate education has achieved that access is relatively open in the USA, regardless of social class, because of a highly differentiated higher-education system and a government-sponsored loan and grant program. Admission requirements are part of institutional autonomy and vary substantially from institution to institution. The duration of masters varies between one and three years. Doctorate programs require a minimum of three or four years of study. A large majority of masters and doctorates in the USA is offered at graduate schools. Graduate programs did not only grow in volume, but there is also a more competitive way of organizing compared to ten years ago.

Quality assurance (QA) in the USA has a long tradition and is organized by regional accrediting bodies at the institutional level and by programmatic accrediting organizations at the program level. Graduate schools are responsible for QA at the program level. Quality enhancement is incorporated in the peer-review process at the institutional or program level. A major development is that there is a demand for more accountability and transparency.

### ***Higher Education in Europe, 2000–2010***

A major reform in higher education, known as the Bologna Process, has taken over Europe and its universities in the past decade. With impressive action lines and biannual ministerial conferences, this process has had not only its impact on the European higher-education systems, but also an important external dimension. Though worldwide seen as a success story, a great challenge remains to make the system more transparent and readable. There is also large variation in the implementation of the action lines. The statement that everyone is singing in the same key, though not necessarily the same tune, seems to be confirmed by this study.

“The attractiveness of Europe increases,” said the former Dutch Minister of Education, Ronald Plasterk, after the Ministerial Bologna Conference in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) on April 29, 2009 (Neth-ER, 2009). His statement is strengthened by the Bologna Policy Forum during that Ministerial Conference. Delegates from countries all over the world applauded the progress made by the Bologna Process and reflected on good practices their countries could take home from Bologna. In the USA there are recent reports about the lessons that the USA could learn from the Bologna Process (Adelman, 2008; 2009). “The author trusts that U.S. readers recognize what hard work and sustained effort going to scale with systemic reform involves, but hopes they can

be inspired to do so by European colleagues and European students who have been at it for a decade” (2009: 233).

Regarding the organization of masters and doctorates on the indicator access and admission, a conclusion is that access to the different Bologna cycles is well organized in Europe and the cycles are defined in terms of qualifications and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. Admission to masters and doctorates shows a lot of variety within Europe. The bachelor’s degree program has a minimum duration of three years (180 ECTS) and a minimum of one year (60 ECTS) in the master’s degree phase (3+1 year). There is however a lot of variation in the duration of masters. Most of master’s programs require two years of study (120 ECTS) and in Medicine often three years (180 ECTS). Doctorates are usually three to four years. European universities face difficulties in setting up joint programs with international partners because of differences in national legislation. The UK, for example, has not implemented ECTS credits but has its own UK credit system, which shows much difference with ECTS. In continental Europe a master student receives 60 ECTS per year, whereas a UK master student receives 180 UK credits per year. A major development in the organizational structure of masters and doctorates is the growth of graduate, research, and/or doctoral schools in universities.

All countries involved in Bologna Process have introduced external QA systems including self-assessment and external review. In most countries universities have established internal QA procedures. There is great diversity between European countries regarding the measurement level of QA, but development towards a light external quality approach seems to be the trend. There is an increase in international cooperation in QA and with European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance and a European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) there is visible formalization of European developments in QA.

In 2008, there has been installed a European Qualification Framework (EQF) in order to better understand and compare national qualifications levels. The EQF consists of eight levels from primary up and until doctoral education. Member States and associate countries of the EU are now developing National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) based on learning outcomes. Each NQF has to be compatible with the EQF, which will make the European higher-education system more transparent than ever before. Countries that already have a compatible NQF in place are Ireland, Malta, UK, France, and Belgium (Flanders). (European Commission, 2011)

### ***Analysis***

In this final paragraph, I will apply the developments in European higher education to the framework of Europeanization by Olsen (2002). After that, I present a conclusion on Europeanization in higher education.

#### *Changing Boundary of Europe*

The Bologna declaration with the intention to create an EHEA was signed in 1999 by 29 countries. Ten years later, in 2010, there are 47 participating countries in the Bologna Process. Some of these countries even do not belong geographically entirely to the European continent. The most clear example is

Russia. The Russian Federation is a member of the Bologna Process, which means that the EHEA covers an area from Reykjavik to Vladivostok. The European sphere of influence in international higher-education policy increased in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the same period the EU grew from 15 to 27 Member States. Therefore it can be concluded that the boundary of Europe did change.

*Developing European-Level Institutions*

In the field of QA in higher education there is development of creating European-level institutions. There are new institutional networks like the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and a new European register of accrediting institutions—European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Another relatively recent phenomenon of European-level institutions is institutional networks of universities, such as the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU), the Coimbra Group (CG) and the League of European Research Universities (LERU). A large, but relatively new European player is the European University Association (EUA). The EUA, founded in 2001, has approximately 850 members amongst European higher-education institutions. In the field of education and research institutional examples at a European level are the Centre Européen de la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN) in Geneva, the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence and the launched in 2008 European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) in Budapest.

*Domestic Impact of European-Level Institutions*

The introduction of the bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. cycles modified the national higher education system—and laws—of the participating countries in the Bologna Process. For example, in the Netherlands the Bologna Process replaced the former *kandidaats-doktoraal* model by the Bachelor–Master structure. Furthermore, Bologna features like ECTS, Diploma supplement, and qualification frameworks (e.g., EQF), have their impact on European universities and governments. Europe had 47 higher-education systems but it seems that there is one system emerging step by step. Also, transparency tools like U-Map and U-Multirank projects, which provide a mapping and a ranking of institutions correspondingly, have—however in an initial phase—a large impact on European universities. This impact stretches beyond the Member States of the EU.

*Exporting European Institutions*

An important European “export product” in the field of higher education is the European Commission Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus). The concept of the Erasmus program is to increase mobility of students and teaching staff through Europe. The project started in 1987 and will welcome the three million mobile students by 2012. The concept has been copied to central and eastern Asia as well as Africa. Erasmus Mundus is another popular program to support the exchange of students and staff between Europe and the rest of the world.

Then there is the Tuning Project program with the projects running in Asia, South-America, Australia, Russia, and the USA. Those are the large-scale projects in which European experts virtually and physically fly around the world

supporting universities, defining, and working with learning outcomes in higher education.

A new feature since the ministerial Bologna-Process meeting in Leuven 2009 is the Bologna policy forum. Countries from all over the world were invited and they came over to Belgium from the USA, China, South Africa, and Brazil to discuss lessons they could learn from Bologna.

Furthermore, European QA organizations operate in the international field of QA

Whether European solutions in higher education exert more influence in global education is something that further research should address. It is however the case that the Bologna Process and the Tuning Project had a constructive contribution on developments of international comparison projects like Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and recent transparency initiatives such as U-Multirank and U-Map.

#### *Political Unification of Europe*

Has Europe become more politically unified because of the developments in higher education between 2000 and 2010? The answer to this question is definitely “Yes.” The interministerial way of organizing the Bologna Process increased the cooperation between the participating countries. Considering the EU, the answer is also “Yes.” Inspired by the New Strategy for Growth and Jobs—the so-called “Europe 2020” strategy—the ministers for education agreed in 2010 to set measurable targets. For example at least 40% of 30-34 year olds should have completed tertiary education (or equivalent) by 2020.

#### **Conclusion**

Applying the framework of Olsen (2002) it can be concluded that there is Europeanization in higher education in the period from 2000 and 2010. First of all there is a larger perspective of Europe. Looking at participating countries, both the EU and the EHEA increased. Secondly, there is an explosion of new European-level institutions in the field of higher education. Subsequently there was a large domestic impact of European agreements by institutions such as the EC. European institutions have had a large impact on the rest of the world and finally, higher education has contributed towards the political unification of Europe. In the world of higher education the European star is rising and is gaining influence, not least in the country with stars and stripes.

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