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## **‘The Politics of Constructing (a Competitive) Europe(an) Through Internationalising Higher Education: Strategy, Structures, Subjects’**

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## 1. Introduction

‘Europe’s’<sup>1</sup> approach to internationalising higher education is a multi-faceted set of political strategies that, over time, has become more complex as an array of European-level actors, and most importantly the European Commission, respond to pressures in the regional and global economies. In this paper I explore this complexity, suggesting that Europe’s inter/nationalising of higher education is a long standing set of projects: culturally—to contribute to the construction of Europe as a distinctive entity; economically—to construct a competitive Europe; and, politically—to locate greater power at the supranational scale that would enable European-level actors more control over regional and global affairs.<sup>2</sup>

The discourse of ‘internationalising’ education suggests that the power to direct education is located with Member States. However this paper argues that the internationalising higher education in Europe—or in other words the discourse that has driven the intensification of trans-border activity across Member State boundaries—are more accurately represented as processes of regionalisation and, more recently, globalisation, and are the outcomes of social forces, both governmental and non-governmental (Cox, 1996), engaged in the progressive restructuring of European social relations in the global political economy. These processes can be discerned through tracing three distinct, dynamic and overlapping policy trajectories. This paper departs, then, from commentators such as Kwiek (see 2004), who argue that instruments like the Bologna Process are ‘relatively closed to global developments’ (p. 759). Instead I will suggest that Bologna should be viewed alongside a sequence of other instruments that are profoundly global in their genesis, logic and ambition—to create a competitive region in the global economy.

## 2. Crossing National Boundaries: Higher Education as the Mechanism for Creating (the) Europe/an (1955-92)

Standard accounts of the early years of Europe’s internationalising of higher education tend to begin with the creation of student mobility programmes in the 1980s (see Neave, 1995). However, Corbett (2003; 2005) argues that the period prior to the 1970s was a highly political and active one for policymaking in the area of higher education and thus “...an essential input into understanding the policy-making process that developed after 1971” (2003: 315). This history begins in June 1955, when senior ministers of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)<sup>3</sup> (later to become the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958) met to consider a basis for extending European integration. At this meeting a proposal was tabled to create a European University (op cit: 317) the realisation of which took almost two decades (in 1971). The reason for this delay was that creating a European higher education institution at this particular historical juncture was highly problematic. The heads of state agreed that education was not to be part of the community’s competence, and that it was a ‘national’ affair. There were also

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<sup>1</sup> I do not see Europe as a fixed and self evident entity; rather, ‘Europe’ is a political project which has been underway since the early 1950s.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that I am not talking about the internationalising strategies of nation states within Europe (eg. Netherlands, UK, Finland). Rather, my concern in this paper is with ‘Europe’ as a regional entity and in particular with the politics of the internationalisation of higher education.

<sup>3</sup> The ECSC was composed of Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, West Germany. It was later renamed the European Community.

fundamental differences of view amongst the 6 member states over what a university should look like. Yet, at the same time, the proposed university offered the potential to advance particular nationally-based political agendas. The French, for example, were attracted to the creation of a university as a vehicle for a European representation of science and research training, while the Italians wanted in on their soil. The universities, for their part, were keen to develop a European dimension to their mobility and exchange programmes (Corbett, 2003: 319). It was, as Corbett shows, a highly political process, as much shaped by already existing structures, the activities of policy entrepreneurs and unexpected events. In 1971, the Ministers agreed to set up a European University Institute in Florence.

It was during this same period that a deal was made by the European partners on cooperation around education. The Hague Summit in November 1969 called for a widening and deepening of the EEC (Corbett, 2003: 319), including education, and was supported by more European-minded university associations. However there was also an emerging view amongst Europhiles that there needed to be European-minded people to run the expanding Community and larger Commission,<sup>4</sup> and that these individuals needed to be educated in such a way as to protect and progress the idea of a European culture and European values.

In 1974 the Ministers of Education set the principles of cooperation in motion. In 1976, following a Resolution of the Council and Ministers of Education, an action programme was established in the field of education (Huisman and van der Wende, 2004: 350). As Corbett (2005: 95) notes, "...the issue was no longer whether the community should play a role in higher education/education. Rather, it was 'what the appropriate mechanisms were for advancing cooperation?'" These decisions and actions entailed cooperation on the development of closer relations between education systems in Europe, increased cooperation between institutions of higher education, possibilities for recognition of qualifications, and freer movement of teachers, students and research workers (Corbett, 2003: 321).

These proposals mirrored the preferred means of cooperation amongst the higher education institutions: that is, bottom-up, and willing to network on a European scale with no real interference at the supranational scale. In other words, implementation itself would reside with Member States rather than at this emerging regional scale. As Corbett details, the success of the Commission in moving into this new policy arena was the result of some very clever framing by Commission personnel; that the EC was a set of resources (soft governance) rather than a means of regulation (hard governance) (Corbett, 2005: 96). However, whether soft or hard, governance means governing (Jacobssen, 2003). Through soft governance, the EC had already begun to provide some direction to higher education policy and higher education area. There was, however, deep suspicion by some Member States (e.g. Danes, British, French) that the EC was moving beyond its spheres of competence and intruding into areas of national sovereignty. Nevertheless, high-level Council initiatives continued to advance the idea of European integration (Corbett, 2005: 114) and regionalism.

Jacques Delors' appointment as President of the Commission in 1985 provided a fresh, more energetic and expansionary direction for the creation of Europe, especially in the face of more than two decades of relative stagnation (Bieler and Morton, 2001: 3). In

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<sup>4</sup> In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined, taking the number of member states to 9. It also meant that the Commission itself had to play a larger role.

1985, the Commission published its famous White Paper, *Completing the Internal Market*, which proposed 300 measures designed to facilitate progress toward the completion of the internal market by 1992 through the abolition of non-tariff barriers (Bieler and Morton, 2001: 3). The *Single European Act* 1987 not only spelled out the goals of the internal market—freedoms of goods, services, capital and labour—but it also strengthened a suite of European-level institutions, such as the European Court of Justice.

Delors<sup>5</sup> “...had a highly developed idea of education and the part it could play in his strategy for advancing European integration via the single market” (Corbett, 2005: 121). Two concerns came together which higher education programmes could mediate; how to create a single market on the one hand and a European citizen on the other whilst combating the narrow nationalism that would get in the way of the ECs territorializing project. The Erasmus Programme, launched in 1987, was an ambitious response. Students could experience first-hand life in another Member State for a recognised period of study abroad; a pool of graduates would be produced with experience of regional cooperation; and the ties between citizens would be strengthened, consolidating the idea of a ‘People’s Europe’ (Corbett, 2005: 130). The target number of students was 10% of the student population. While the rectors gave it their unanimous support, concerns were expressed at national level over jurisdiction and resources, and it was some time and with much high-level politicking that Erasmus was sealed as a deal. This was a momentous occasion. For the first time, full Community authority was being exercised for higher education cooperation, with the agreement of the Member States. According to Teichler (1999: 11), Erasmus also “triggered off a re-thinking in higher education” largely because it challenged the typical model of international movement of students (from the colonised south to the imperialising north).<sup>6</sup>

	Hosted	Sent	1997/1998 ratio
United Kingdom	20,938	10,582	1.98
Netherlands	4,939	4,171	1.18
Germany	10,991	13,785	0.8
Norway	818	1,071	0.76
Portugal	1,382	1,834	0.75
Austria	1,744	2,438	0.72
Greece	994	1,431	0.69
Total Europe	86,248	86,263	1

Source: Teichler (2002).

Table 1: ERASMUS Student Mobility: Actual Numbers of Students Sent and Hosted by Countries

The ongoing evidence suggests that there was a significant shortfall in reaching the target of 10% and that ten years on, little more than 1% of students had been involved (see Teichler, 1999). Recent figures suggest that this pattern has not changed much (Huisman and van der Wende, 2004: 350); in 2005, Erasmus Scholarships had supported only 1.4 million students (European Commission, 2005a). However, as Teichler noted: “The

<sup>5</sup> Delors was President of the European Commission from 1985-1995

<sup>6</sup> While this might be the case, it could also be argued that new ‘north-south’ relations have been constructed within the region (eg. Greek students studying in the UK)

numbers were sufficiently large to lift student mobility within Europe from an exceptional activity of the individual to a phenomenon which forces institutions of higher education to reconsider their curricula and their services for these students” (Teichler, 1999: 11). Mobility also revealed the diverse nature of national higher education systems across the Member States, and the complicated issue of credit transfer.

In reviewing this first phase or policy trajectory the internationalising higher education discourse was distinctively regional in scope and ambition. Movements that were facilitated by programmes such as Erasmus or the European University Institute (EUI), whilst contained within the borders of the Community, were to produce Europe as a region and an entity, and promote European values. That those borders were being redrawn over to time to include new members<sup>7</sup> made the regionalising project—in particular its political dimensions and cultural—more pressing. Culturally, the concern was to create a European citizen with a European sensibility and sense of responsibility to a bigger political entity—Europe. Economically, higher education would contribute a pool of graduates for the single market, while politically this pool of graduates would be the new intelligentsia for European governing. Erasmus, when it was finally launched, was to be the main vehicle for this regionalising project. Modelled on existing activity,<sup>8</sup> it was supported by a network of university rectors and academics<sup>9</sup> who, in turn, became its advocates. This enabled the Commission to promote a European agenda for higher education without charges of it undermining national sovereignty—a strategy that it learnt to pursue later on. The production of Europe as a region, using institutional capacity within higher education and instruments such as Erasmus, were profoundly shaped by the politics of post-war reconstruction and economic survival. In that sense, regionalisation was intimately linked to the global, even it had not yet come to be theorised in that way.

### **3. Creating the New Europe and Europe of Knowledge through Blurring National Boundaries**

In 1992, a single market and European Union was created under the Treaty of the European Union (Maastricht Treaty). The Maastricht Treaty, for the first time, gave the European Union a direct role in education. Losing no time, the Commission made an internal assessment of its programs and developed a new strategy. While the Maastricht Treaty appeared to suggest that the role would be modest, the European Commission, still under the Presidency of Jacques Delors, had other ambitions. A 1991 *Memorandum on Higher Education* shows that higher education “...had already become part of the Community’s broader agenda of economic and social coherence” (Huisman and van der Wende, 2004: 350). The Commission also began to look outward - beyond the region, establishing programmes with non-EU third countries, for example the ALPHA programme in Latin America, and the Asia-Europe Link with ASEAN<sup>10</sup> countries.

To make sense of the politics behind the Memorandum and the events that followed, it is critical that we consider the changing nature of the wider economic and geopolitical

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<sup>7</sup> Greece joined in 1981; Portugal and Spain joined in 1986, and in 1990, East Germany became part of a unified Germany.

<sup>8</sup> The Joint Study Programme was the predecessor of Erasmus.

<sup>9</sup> The expansion in the number of Erasmus Thematic Networks in the last 10 years is a case in point.

<sup>10</sup> ASEAN – Association of South East Asian Nations – in 1967 this included Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Phillipines

context. In 1991-92 the biggest economies (including Germany) experienced a recession which increased the number of unemployed graduates in Europe (Teichler and Kehm, 1995). This provided some legitimacy for the ECs higher education project. However, of greater significance were the wider changes taking place in the global economy as a result of economic globalisation; the transnationalisation of production and finance at the material level, and the shift from Keynesianism to neo-liberalism at the ideological level (Cox, 1993: 259-60). These structural changes in the global economy not only had direct implications for the EU, but they directly affected the restructuring of the EU. To be competitive in the global economy, Europe had to transform itself along free trade and free market lines. As Bieler and Morton argue, "...the deregulation of the national financial markets was institutionalised in the Internal Market Programme...while the shift toward neo-liberalism was expressed by the very nature of the Internal Market programme and its drive for liberalisation and the neo-liberal convergence criteria of EMU [sic: European Monetary Union] focusing on low inflation and price stability" (2001: 5).

The ascendancy of neo-liberal theory in policymaking gave prominence to particular ways of looking at (higher) education—as human capital, as an engine for economic growth, as a private rather than public good, and as a new services sector within the economy. This was reflected in European-level policymaking and instruments—such as a Europe of Knowledge, a European knowledge-based economy, technology policy, research and development, and so on. These policies aligned themselves with the view, long promoted by the Organisation for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) (see Mattelart 1996), that post-industrial societies would be information or knowledge-based.

Creating the 'New Europe'—to formally include a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and European Research Area (ERA)—was both a response to and outcome of these wider dynamics. In January 2000, upon the proposal of the European Commission, a decision was taken to establish a European Research and Innovation Area (ERIA). The principal objective of the ERIA was to create a knowledge-based economy – the Europe of Knowledge. The mandate and agenda for doing this was articulated in the now famous Lisbon Strategy, part of the EU's wider economic platform. That

...the European Union must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (European Council, Lisbon, March 2000).

This meant extending the reach of Europe's constitutionally-framed 'competence' deeper into national territory – education.

Like the Erasmus initiative, which grafted itself onto an existing scheme, the Lisbon Agenda also had a mechanism it could turn to; the Bologna Process (Bologna Declaration, 1999). Launched in 1999 (Bologna Declaration, 1999), the Bologna Process aimed at creating a European Higher Education Area. Like with the Erasmus negotiations, the Bologna Process had been set in train, not by the Commission but by the European Universities Association (EUA) and endorsed by the European Ministers of Education (Tomusk, 2004). Much is made of this fact, particularly by the Commission, who continue to be highly sensitive to charges of interference in 'national' affairs.

However, the Commission is a key stakeholder in the process, and is active in promoting the Process in the interests of the Lisbon agenda and Europe's overall position in the global economy.

The Bologna Declaration committed an initial set of 29 signatories to six objectives which, together, aim to establish, a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 (EUA, 2006). Within the EHEA, staff and student mobility is to be enhanced by the alignment of national quality assurance agencies, uniform degree structures, the adoption of a credit transfer system and a common way of describing the qualification (diploma supplement). Responsibility for implementing the goals of the Bologna Declaration in each signatory country lies with its academic institutions, student organisations and professional bodies. It is, however, a profoundly 'European Project' in ambition, substance and interests. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) has overall steerage of the Bologna Process, it is chaired by the EU Presidency, and is composed of representatives of the member states along with the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

At one level, the Bologna Process appears to have none of the high drama that might be associated with such a revolutionary move. Sorting out a system of credit transfer for undergraduate and master's level courses (cycle 1 and 2), a means of making degrees readable, and determining mechanisms of quality assurance are, in themselves, technical procedures. However, like all technical matters, they are also highly political and in a world where the higher education sector is increasingly viewed as an engine for the knowledge-based economy, the stakes are high (see Table 2 where Europe is contrasted with Canada/USA). Yet, developing a supranational (or European) higher education system means running head-long into national and local interests. The language used to describe the Bologna Process, as a tool to *connect* education systems so as to ensure the diversity of national systems rather than producing harmonisation (see EUA, 2006: 2), suggests how sensitive it is to charges of imperialism. Yet, in anyone's language, the realisation of a European higher education system is a dramatic change in the political and economic landscape of the region. The scale of the Bologna Process initiative can be appreciated in the following facts: that it involves around 5,600 public and private institutions hosting 16 million students and is growing. The EHEA is conceptualised as a vast reservoir of talent for the economy and be a vehicle through which a coherent 'European' sensibility could be built. By constructing a EHEA it is also possible to make it intelligible as a single system (rather than the sum of many) and thus a destination and market for international student.

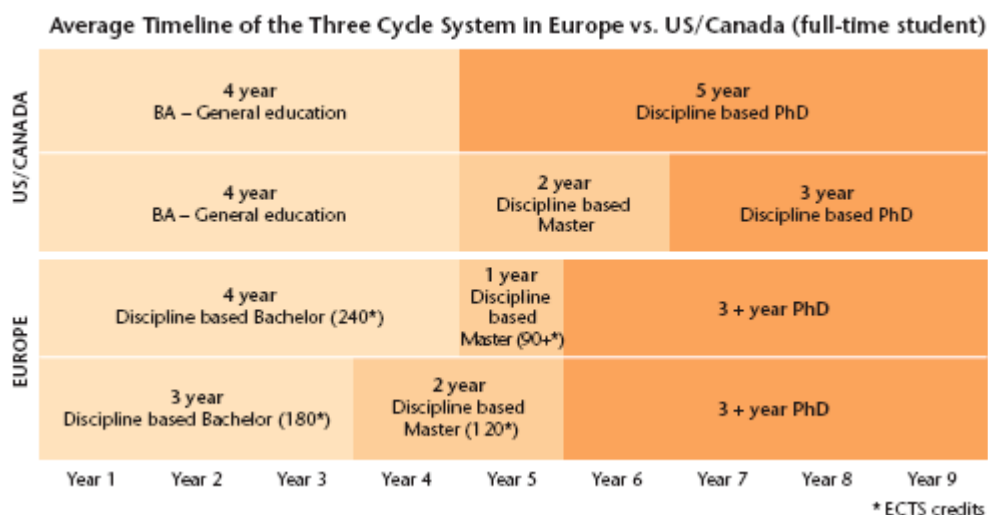


Table 2: Comparison of European Qualification Framework with that of the USA/Canada (Source: EUA, 2006: 5)

Indeed, the stakes are sufficiently high to cause the Australian government to release a paper, *The Bologna Process and Australia: Next Steps* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2006) and put into place a series of projects<sup>11</sup> that enable Australia to develop ‘Bologna comparability’ (AVCC, 2006: 6; 9)— and to assess whether any of the Asia-Pacific governments are intending to implement the Bologna structures (op. Cit: 7)—for a significant proportion of Australia’s education export income comes from European and Asian students studying graduate programmes in Australia. Australia has a huge share of the international student market (Australia Technology Network, 2005: 1) and to say globally competitive it has to monitor developments that might undermine its position in the global marketplace. The USA has also been catapulted into crisis (see, for example, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education) because of the sheer size of the EHEA and its mobilisation of various instruments to recruit brain power for the European economy.

The Bologna Process is also very expansionist. This has taken a number of forms. The first is with membership of the European Higher Education Area. From the initial 29 signatories in 1999 the number rapidly rose to 45. The European Higher Education Area now includes Russia and southeast Europe, extending far beyond ‘Europe’ as a constitutional entity. The flexibility of the European boundary, so as to include bordering countries who are not members of the EU, suggests that Bologna is strategically deployed to: (i) limit the encroachment of foreign, for instance USA-based, private higher education providers into territories that border the EU (Scott, 2002); (ii) expand the pool of educated labour beyond the EU boundary; (iii) provide a template for quality for public and private higher education institutions in these post-communist countries (Fried, Glass and Maumgartl, 2006); and give additional dynamism to the process (Tomusk, 2004: 86).

Second, projects like ‘Tuning Educational Structures in Europe’ have been incorporated into the Bologna Process as a solution to a particular kind of problem; how to ‘translate’

<sup>11</sup> Curtin University of Technology in Perth. Western Australia is currently undertaking a feasibility study of implementing the Diploma Supplement.



curriculum experiences from across diverse institutional and national settings into equivalents, enabling the translatability, coherence and mobility.<sup>12</sup> ‘Tuning’, as it has come to be known, was funded under the Erasmus Thematic Network Programme of the EC and extends to all Universities in the European Higher Education Area. The mechanism of translation developed by this network is the development of a hierarchical framework of general and specific competencies and learning outcomes. Much is made of the fact that Tuning is driven by institutions in Member States. However, not only did the Commission choose to fund and then champion the Tuning Project, but other Erasmus Thematic Networks were required (in other words this was not negotiable) to ‘Tune’ their curricula.

Third, under the auspices of the Bologna Process,<sup>13</sup> new items have been added to the agenda intended to realise the aim of a European knowledge society (cf. EUA, 2005). In the Berlin 2003 meeting, PhD programmes were included in the scope of the European Higher Education Area (EUA, 2005). This resulted in the EUA sponsoring a project on doctoral careers<sup>14</sup> as well as running a series of workshops for universities on the organisation of doctoral/graduate schools in a European context.<sup>15</sup> This work has a strong pedagogical and governance thrust. This can be seen, for instance, in concerns over appropriate forms of supervision and viva arrangements, and in the recommendation that data on completion rates and career outcomes be collected. The idea of a European Doctorate (or Doctor Europaeus) is contemplated by the EUA as a “...a powerful tool for making the Lisbon objectives more visible and for making the doctoral degree more attractive to young people as a symbol of European research collaboration...” and that “...An open debate on the European doctorate should be part of a wider discussion on internationalisation of higher education and research and on building a competitive European Higher Education Area” (EUA, 2005: 29-30). The focus on PhD training and programmes is viewed as a necessary bridge between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research and Innovation Area.

Two years later at the 2005 Bergen meeting, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) adopted an overarching framework for qualifications and agreed upon a set of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance. This includes nationally-based quality assurance agencies submitting themselves to a cycle of review; the development of a European register of quality assurance agencies “...making it easier to identify professional and creditable agencies” (EUA, 2006: 6); the creation of a European Register Committee to oversee the inclusion of agencies on the register, and the establishment of an annual forum so that quality assurance agencies, universities and other stakeholders could meet and discuss ongoing issues (op. Cit).

Developments under Bologna contribute to a thickening landscape of European structures, policies and programmes that register and translate the experiences of the European learner and worker. The *European Qualifications Framework* (launched in 2005) (European Commission, 2005b: 4) is a meta-framework consisting of common reference points (some developed by the Tuning Project) at 8 levels. This enables users to see how qualifications embedded in national system relate to each other (op. Cit: 12). It is also intended to capture the complexity of lifelong learning and promote the mobility of learners and workers (op. Cit: 7) (see Table 3).

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.europeunit.ac.uk/qualifications/tuning\\_project.cfm](http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/qualifications/tuning_project.cfm)

<sup>13</sup> See [http://www.eua.be/eua/en/bologna\\_basics.jsp](http://www.eua.be/eua/en/bologna_basics.jsp)

<sup>14</sup> Though only 22 countries across Europe were involved.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.eua.be/eua/en/publications.jsp>

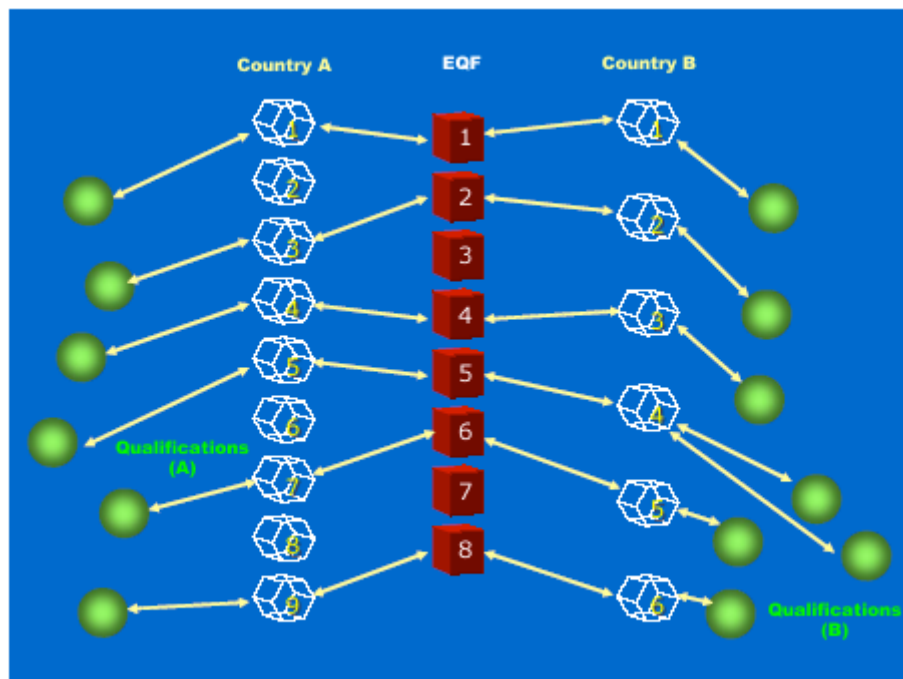


Table 3: A Meta-Framework Enabling and Simplifying the Relationship between National Qualifications Framework and Systems (CEC 2005: 13).

The Europass<sup>16</sup> on the other hand, is the individual's learning and working ID<sup>17</sup> and it is expected that 3 million Europeans (though this is less than a very modest 1%) will adopt this by 2010. "It is designed to encourage mobility and lifelong learning in an enlarged Europe" (European Commission, 2005). The Europass consists of 5 documents:

- Europass CV (common CV structure),
- Europass Mobility (record in a common format transnational mobility for learning purposes),
- Europass Diploma Supplement (personal document which records the holders educational record),
- Europass Certificate Supplement (supplement of vocational education and training), and
- Europass Language Portfolio (record of linguistic skills)<sup>18</sup>

While the Bologna Process (reform of structures), Tuning (instrument for translation) and EQF (hierarchy of qualifications) are mechanisms for making education experiences and education systems across Member States intelligible at a European scale, the Europass carries the individually encoded information on learning and workplace experiences. In other words, qualifications and competences are a currency that can be earned and spent across Europe.<sup>19</sup> Critics, however, argue that the Europass does not address more fundamental issues associated with barriers to mobility such as professional accreditation, language and xenophobia. Others suggest that the one size fits all CV might well be jettisoned by more creative and competitive individuals, keen to show their

<sup>16</sup> Available at a dedicated Europass Portal see <http://europass.cedefop.edu.int>

<sup>17</sup> It was launched in 2004 and ratified by the European Parliament and Council

<sup>18</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/europass/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/europass/index_en.html)

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/qualifications/index.cfm>

difference from rather than adherence to a European script (see debate in OBHE, 2006: 2).

In reviewing the nature and consequences of the internationalising of higher education in this second policy trajectory, the discourse of a globally-competitive knowledge economy, and obstacles to achieving that, provides the rationale and legitimacy for the creation of a European higher education system. The effect of this has been to force upon Member States, and invite if not challenge those beyond, to engage in dramatic structural changes in their higher education systems. Politically, regionalising education has blurred the boundaries around Member States spheres of interest and opened up the higher education territory of Member States to European level governance sphere. And while the key actors insist that these processes are driven by Member States, there is considerable evidence that there is a coalition of social forces at the European scale who are shaping the regionalising project. What this second trajectory also reveals is the remarkable extension of Bologna Process beyond the borders of constitutional Europe (Kwiek, 2004), to include those on the perimeter of an expanding Europe who see themselves as Europeans, whose inclusion limits access by global education firms, and who provide a pool of educated labour on the periphery of the region (see EC, 2006b).

This is not to suggest that the Bologna Process has been willingly or wittingly embraced at the institutional (or indeed national) levels, or that the discursive and the material are direct reflections of each other. Nor is there a coherent view of Europe, or what it means to be European. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that engagement with Bologna is highly uneven across the European Higher Education area<sup>20</sup> and may require concessions for the eastern European and Balkan countries (Kwiek, 2004: 760). Neither do I want to suggest that becoming a part of the European Higher Education Area will benefit those inside it equally. As Kwiek notes,

...the promotion of mobility in higher education is likely to benefit those affluent, generally Western countries; thus from a national perspective, there are gains and losses of such increasing movement of the best talent available; for the more 'exporting' (transition) than 'importing' (old EU) countries, the issue is not going to be uncontroversial in the long run (Kwiek, 2004: 770).

In other words, mobility giving rise to charges of brain drain will have effects on national and sub-national economies and policies of Member States. This may well result in the reinstatement and reinforcement of views that national interests need protecting.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. Destination 'Europe': The European Higher Education Area as Lure**

If the internationalisation of higher education in the two earlier policy trajectories has been oriented predominantly toward a regionalising project, from around 2003 the EU has begun to pursue a more explicit globalising strategy. In a speech delivered in 2003 to the opening of the World Education Market, Viviane Reding, Member of the EC responsible for Education and Culture, laid out the bases for 'Making the EU a

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<sup>20</sup> Accession countries display greater levels of commitment to the EUs internationalising programmes, such as Erasmus (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2005)

<sup>21</sup> There are highly uneven patterns of mobility across Europe; for example, the lowest outbound mobility ratios are the UK (1%) and Spain (1.4%), whilst France, Germany, Greece and Italy have the largest number of mobile students (OBHE, 2006: 2)

prominent figure in the World Education Market' arguing that "...national governments alone cannot meet the challenges of globalisation new technologies and the single market" (p. 2). This includes a new role for the private sector. Internationalising European higher education is now externally-oriented, market-driven and globalising.

From 2003, a suite of programme initiatives have been launched, all characterised by a strong emphasis on global competitiveness and the development of a European higher education market. Initiatives include the recruitment of talent from around the globe (Erasmus Mundus), the sale of the idea of Bologna globally through Tuning and Asia-Link projects, and the creation a European higher education market and industry. These are outlined below.

The shift toward the global must be seen in the light of huge competition for international students in the globalising education industry, and awareness by the EC that, to date, Europe has little presence in the global market as a preferred destination.<sup>22</sup> Over 2 million students are enrolled in higher education institutions outside of their country of citizenship, and these numbers are expected to rise in the future, with some pundits suggesting figures like 7.6 million by 2025 (EC, 2004: 16) This concern is also seen in a variety of EC policies and initiatives, for instance in the Asia-Link programme, where the EC hopes to spark interest in Europe in the Asian Imaginary (see Robertson, 2006) and through a series of funded Asia Fairs.<sup>23</sup> The EC is also an aggressive negotiator in the World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) processes, and has been pursuing the liberalisation of education services in the various round of trade talks (Oxfam, 2005). However, Europe appears a long way from being able to create a globally-competitive higher education industry, able to lure full foreign fee-paying students to Europe as the preferred destination, though the EC is now supporting a marketing strategy for the EHEA (EC, 2006b: 7).

In 2004 a EC commissioned report on the perceptions of *European Higher Education in Third Countries* argued that the EU would have to determine a brand for itself if it was going to be able to compete with the USA and Australia as the preferred destination for students. It notes: "Overall, Europe is not perceived as a union as regards higher education. However, when it comes to cultural aspects and higher education, most students saw Europe as a range of very different countries..." (EC, 2004: 10). Furthermore, the report notes that Asian students in particular have a weak preference for Europe. "Beyond this, respondents saw the most substantial discrepancies regarding cost-related issues (both tuition and living costs) and student support" (EC, 2004: 11)

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<sup>22</sup> The UK (British Council), Germany (DAAD) and France (EDUFRANCE) are all active exporters in the global marketplace.

<sup>23</sup> A series of seven events to promote European higher education, funded by the European Commission's Asia-Link Programme, is taking place in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam between 2006 and 2008. The European Higher Education Fairs will be organised by a consortium of four European agencies led by EduFrance (France) and composed of DAAD (Germany), Nuffic (The Netherlands) and the British Council (United Kingdom). The events aim to increase the attractiveness of Europe as a study and research centre for excellence, to strengthen Europe's economic and cultural presence in Asia and vice-versa, to enhance mutual awareness and contribute to the further development of EU-Asian cooperation in the field of higher education. Each event will be composed of two components: an Asia-Link Symposium and a European Higher Education Fair. The Symposia will provide a platform for high-level dialogue on EU-Asian cooperation and for developing awareness of EU mechanisms and programmes, while the Fairs will provide a platform for representatives of national structures and Higher Education Institutions from all 25 EU member states to give information on study opportunities in Europe. Applications to take part in the fairs and/or Asia-Link Symposia must be made online with deadlines varying according to the event of interest.

The discrepancies in tuition fees across Europe is viewed as a serious problem by those hoping to generate a competitive higher education market at the level of Europe. In a EUA survey in 2005, 7 of the EU 27 countries charged fees to all students, 7 charged fees to some students, and 13 did not charge fees at all, including 'foreign' students. Implementing a regime of student fees, even for international students, is regarded as a very controversial move in a number of EU Member States (see OBHE, 2005; Huisman and van de Wende, 2004: 354). Proposals to the Finnish Parliament to charge international students tuition fees were overturned in 2006.

A second example is the Erasmus Mundus Programme. Erasmus Mundus is intended to recruit the best brains from around the world and was launched along with urgings to mobilise the brainpower of Europe (EC, 2005d). This Programme funds joint Masters that must operate across at least 3 European Union universities and is open to European and Non-European students, though there is a particular emphasis on recruiting Asian students. The hope is that the best overseas talent might be retained in the EU, and that the EU's expenditure on Master's research training programmes will generate greater research activity across the region. The first phase of the Erasmus Mundus is now running (2004-2008), and with the hope that it will support 250 Master's programmes and around 5,000 scholarships. Comparing it with the US's Fulbright Programme established in 1946, the European Union of Students (ESIB) have been highly critical of Erasmus Mundus, arguing that it will exaggerate problems of brain drain. It has also resulted in the US operating in crisis mode to restore US competitiveness, arguing that "the best and the brightest are a sought after commodity (NAFSA, 2006). The US's position, of course, has been seriously jeopardised with tight security and immigration laws following September 11.

Thirdly the Bologna Process, and associated projects like Tuning Project, is being globalised (as well as receiving a global reaction – see above). In an EC Communiqué in 2006, the Commission argued that "Ministers see the European Higher Education Area as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world..." and noted that... "The role and visibility of higher education in EU external relations is increasingly toward neighbouring countries (European Neighbourhood Policy), in relation to industrialised nations (OECD/G8) and with developing countries (Alban, Asia Link etc" (p. 7). The BFUG have also been given the mandate to elaborate and agree on a strategy for the external dimension in order to strengthen the attractiveness of the EHEA. (BFUG Work Programme, 2005-2007). This strategy, to be with other regions rather than countries (BFUG, 2005), is to be tabled at the London 2007 Ministerial meeting. The task ahead is to create the conditions for international mobility (mode 4 of the GATS agreement), recognition structures, cooperation and attractiveness (see, for example, Nordic Bologna Process Official Seminar to be held in September, 2006).

In 2003, the Tuning Group—supported by the European Commission—launched its Latin American venture *Tuning America Latina*, funded under the ALPHA programme. This is an ambitious initiative. It involves 18 countries (including Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela) and 180 universities. The subject areas that are being dealt with include Education, History, Medicine, Geology, Physics and Mathematics. The venture has involved surveying students, employers and universities views on learning outcomes and competencies in the specified subject area, and then assembling these competencies so as to develop a tool of translation within the Latin American region, and in relation to the EU (Wagenaar, 2006). As Figure 1 (drawn from one of the presentations given by Tuning Coordinator, Robert Wagenaar, 2006) also shows, the

scope of ambition is not confined to Latin America. Russia, Asia and Africa are all on the radar for Tuning.

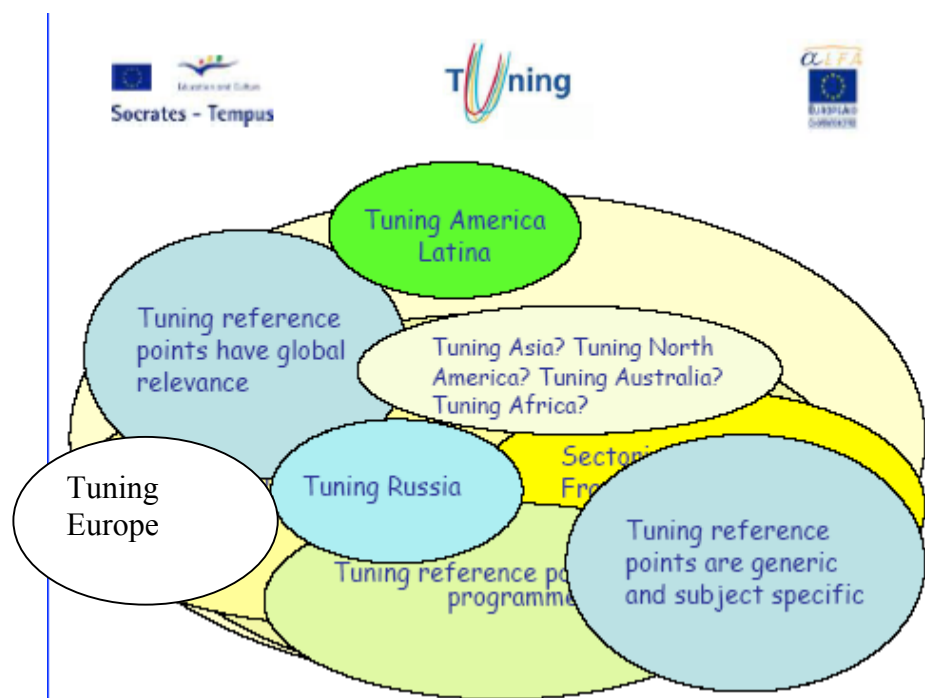


Figure 1: Tuning Latino Americano – And Beyond

Despite these rather ambitious global strategies, a Mid-Term Review (European Commission, 2005c) concluded that the Lisbon strategy had failed to deliver a satisfactory economic growth performance and that Europe was far from achieving the potential for change that the Lisbon strategy offered (see also Dion, 2005). The Review gave further impetus to a direction that was already well in train,<sup>24</sup> though now there is a new sense of urgency surrounding many Commission reports (EC, 2005d) around mobilising the brain power of Europe.

## 5. Civilising or Imperialising Europe? A Problematic Subject

Through locating internationalising higher education within Europe historically and spatially, we can see the changing nature, scale and scope of this geopolitical project. It is also possible to see the complex structure of internationalised reality over time, and as it is reflected in the principles embraced by the Higher Education policy agenda. Throughout, however, there are important continuities in the project. One is that rhetorically, the project of internationalising has continued to be constructed as activity that is driven by member states. Yet, as we can see, it is profoundly European, both in terms of the actors progressing these changes and in the overall purpose—to build a European region that is able to more effectively compete in the global economy. The delicate line to tread has been, and continues to be, how to construct a European higher education system without charges of interference. This is a highly political process that is

<sup>24</sup> An earlier Kok Report (2004) pointed to a general unwillingness to engage in Lisbon, too broad an agenda, poor coordination and conflicting the priorities.

being progressed by a coalition of interests who operate on multiple scales (supranational, national and institutional) who have been able to progress a radical agenda for higher education change. The discontinuity with the past is the scale, scope and consequences of the ideological and political regionalising and globalising project for higher education. Under the rubric of the knowledge-based economy, higher education is valued for its economic rather than cultural contribution, as a lucrative market and as a means for generating new value through innovation and patents.

It is possible to discern two strategies that have been pursued over time, using the discourse of internationalisation of higher education. The first is a regionalising strategy; to build a coherent set of structures that enable a European higher education system, and Europe, to come into existence. The second is the more recent globalising strategy in higher education which, as we see in this current phase, both legitimates the EC as a state-like actor on the global stage and provides a springboard for Europe's discursive and material-based competition with the US for the hearts, minds and pockets of individuals in different various spheres of the world. While for a long time Europe has legitimated its activities by presenting itself as a civilising rather than imperialising presence, its more explicit economic and transnational interests opens it up to charges of modern day colonialism and imperialism. The question remains, then as to how long Europe will be able to promote itself as a political alternative to Anglo-Saxon models of capitalist imperialist development, and how the US, Australia, China and India might respond as they ratchet up the stakes

There are also major tensions and contradictions within Europe that will mediate progress. These include how the European Union's strategies will work with or against those of its Member States and how the cultural and economic dimensions will be balanced against each other. There are also tensions that will, if they have not already, emerge between the two spheres of Europe; a constitutionally-anchored sphere that provides citizenship entitlements, and a more expansive education space that entitles citizens to a Europass and Europeanised qualification, but non of the benefits of citizenship (e.g. European fees as opposed to 'foreign' fees). This raises all kinds of issues around the relationship between education, citizenship and entitlement in the European space which are yet to be debated.

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