

International openness and globalisation challenges - key factors in the development of the *Erasmus for All* programme

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ABSTRACT: For the past five years the priorities of international activities for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been changing rapidly in content and geographical area: the spectrum of activities is changing and new forms of these are emerging. European HEIs increasingly are facing the need to create a more diverse range of international activities. During the evolution of international activities, from mobility to international education hubs, universities are searching for new internationalisation tools to implement those activities more effectively in terms of finance and time. There is an obvious trend of moving from Euro-centred towards global-centred for HEIs in Europe. The programme, *Erasmus for All (European community action scheme for the mobility of university students)* is analysed in this paper as an emerging platform by which to boost European HEI visibility in the global arena and to respond to the contemporary needs of European universities. This should facilitate a qualitative leap in the internationalisation practices of European HEIs, particularly by strengthening ties with non-European institutions and forging global multilateral partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

For the past five years, the priorities of Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) international activities have been changing rapidly in terms of content and geographical areas of activity: the spectrum of activities is changing and new forms of activities are emerging. European HEIs increasingly are facing the need to create a more diverse range of international activities. During the evolution of international activities, from mobility to international education hubs, universities are searching for new internationalisation tools to implement those activities more effectively in terms of finance and time.

There is an obvious trend of moving from Euro-centred towards global-centred for HEIs in Europe. Even the largest and financially strong institutions are facing obstacles to do so with their own resources. Therefore, a pan-European support system is crucial for both small and large, state and private universities.

A new EU programme, *Erasmus for All (European community action scheme for the mobility of university students)*, will be launched in 2014, which merges the initiatives and needs of bottom-up institutional players with top-down pan-European policies. The new EU programme has great potential to become a framework providing universities with financial and structural opportunities to change and renew their profile of international activities and to implement new approaches to internationalisation, such as those described by theory. Theory covers three generations of internationalisation, viz. in HE, resource-based theories and networking theories.

The *Erasmus for All* programme is analysed in this paper as an emerging platform to boost European HEI visibility in the global arena and to respond to the contemporary needs of European universities. This should facilitate a qualitative leap in the internationalisation practices of European HEIs, particularly by strengthening ties with non-European institutions and forging global multilateral partnerships.

Lithuania and other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries are prospective beneficiaries of these new opportunities. The national Programme for Promotion of the International Dimension in Higher Education in Lithuania was recently approved, where the development and delivery of joint study programmes is deemed to be one of the strategic tenets for internationalisation.

Several new national initiatives have been launched: a support scheme for foreigners admitted to full-time second-cycle study (i.e. graduate (Master's or specialised professional)) programmes at Lithuanian HEIs; a guest lecturer programme; a national programme to establish joint faculties with international partners, etc. The internationalisation practices and cases that provide future building blocks for this new internationalisation period are further presented in this paper.

STRENGTHENING QUALITY THROUGH MOBILITY AND CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION

Modern and effective higher education systems are the foundation of an open, confident and sustainable society and of a creative, innovative and entrepreneurial knowledge-based economy. Learning mobility helps individuals increase their professional, social and intercultural skills and employability [1]. The ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have agreed to double the proportion of students completing a study or training period abroad to 20% of the total number of students by 2020 [2].

Attracting the best students, academics and researchers from outside the EU and developing new forms of cross-border co-operation are key drivers of quality. Although some member states are very attractive study destinations, the EU as a region needs to increase its efforts to attract the best students and researchers in order to compete with the US and Australia. Europe's attractiveness can be enhanced if a number of concerns are addressed urgently: the increasing costs and uneven quality of education; national differences and obstacles to academic recognition; non-transparent recruitment and unattractive working conditions for researchers; problems in obtaining visas to study and work. The key policy issues for EU member states and higher education institutions to address are to:

- Encourage institutions to integrate learning mobility more systematically into curricula; eliminating unnecessary barriers of a transfer from Bachelor to Master's studies; identifying obstacles for cross-border co-operation and exchanges.
- Ensure smooth recognition of credits gained abroad through effective quality assurance, comparable and consistent use of the European Credit Transfer and accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement that links qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework.
- Improve education access, employment conditions and progression opportunities for international students, researchers and teachers, including full implementation of the Directives on students and researchers [3] and the EU Visa Code to facilitate the issuing of Schengen visas to students and researchers undertaking short stays. (A Schengen visa covers all European Union countries (except the UK and the Republic of Ireland) plus Iceland, Switzerland and Norway).

Currently, information on the performance of higher education institutions focuses mainly on research-intensive universities and, thus, covers only a very small proportion of Europe's HEIs. It is essential to develop a wider range of analysis and information covering all aspects of performance of HEIs. This will help students make informed study choices and enable institutions to identify and develop their strengths. It would also support policy-makers in their strategic choices on the reform of higher education systems. A multi-dimensional ranking is feasible and widely supported by education institutions. The proposed *U-Multirank*: a new performance-based ranking and information tool for profiling higher education institutions, can radically improve the transparency of the higher education sector. The first results, providing such rankings, should be available in 2013.

The Bologna Process, which aims to harmonise education across the EU, significantly reinforced mobility and co-operation in the European Higher Education Area. The EU mobility programmes, such as Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus (which promotes scholarships and co-operation across Europe and the rest of the world), have achieved far-reaching positive effects for individuals and institutions. Three million students will have benefited from the current Erasmus programme by 2013. The European Commission is developing a *mobility scoreboard* to assess progress in removing obstacles to learning mobility within the EU [4]. However, substantial mobility flows can be a challenge for those educational systems that receive substantial inflows of students, or result in a *brain drain* from countries where talented young people choose to study and afterwards live abroad. Lithuania is among such countries.

A Master's degree allows students to acquire the kind of advanced skills that are particularly valuable for knowledge-intensive jobs and research. However, current EU funding instruments (covering up to ten months of studies abroad) do not support full degree mobility at the Master's level, which generally requires financial support for 12 months or more. Existing restrictions on the portability of national loans limit their application for taking a full degree abroad. Mobility for researchers will be facilitated by the European Framework for Research Careers, a new transparency tool to be applied in the EURAXESS Jobs Portal (<http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/general/about>).

Europe's future capacity for innovation will depend upon higher education institutions fully embracing their role within the knowledge triangle, alongside business and non-university research organisations. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) provides a genuine model for integrating higher education into the knowledge triangle [5]. Marie Curie Actions (research fellowships) are also an effective tool for stimulating knowledge transfer. The European Commission is also developing European Industrial Doctorates and Doctoral Schools to foster innovation in the training of the researchers of tomorrow.

The success of the Erasmus placements illustrates the demand for opportunities to gain practical, work-relevant experience as part of higher educational study programmes. However, internships and placements today do not always provide the right conditions for students to develop their skills and receive appropriate recognition for experience gained. There is a necessity for the wider systematic support for internships to help students and graduates get the practical knowledge needed for the workplace and obtain better quality placements.

The internationalisation and openness of higher education systems requires a joint approach from a wide range of policy areas and stakeholders in order to attract the best students, staff and researchers from around the world, to increase international outreach and visibility, and to foster international networks of excellence. The new tools of internationalisation of higher education will promote the EU as a study and research destination for top talent from around the world [6]. The development of partnerships of higher education institutions with partners beyond the European Union should strengthen national education systems, policy dialogue, mobility and academic recognition. The existing Mobility Partnerships should enhance and facilitate exchanges of students and researchers.

Since 2008, Europe has been undergoing an economic and financial crisis, with damaging societal effects. Within the field of higher education, the crisis is affecting funding and making graduates' job prospects more uncertain. *Erasmus for All* is the new EU programme for education, training, youth and sport proposed by the European Commission on 23 November 2011. The proposal is now under discussion by the Council (27 Member States of the EU) and the European Parliament, who will make the final decision (Figure 1).

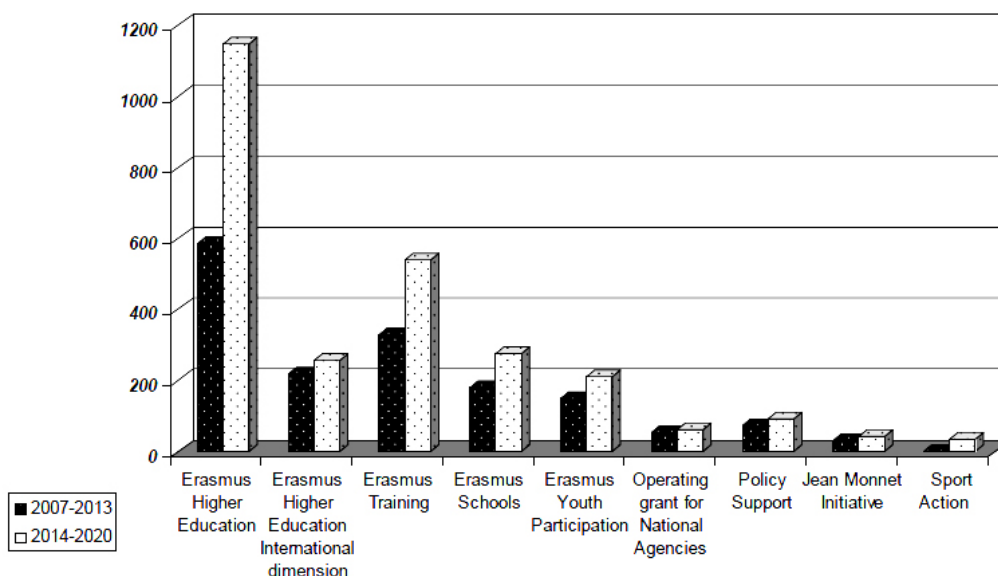


Figure 1: Possible *Erasmus for All* yearly funding evolution 2014-2020 compared to 2007-2013 [1].

THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA) YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Internationalisation is the process by which international standards and aspects of international culture are integrated into teaching, research and the service functions of an organisation. Internationalisation is changing education, as well as the business world. Internationalisation is a complex phenomenon, affecting various social and economic activities of countries and regions in ways that are interrelated and partially overlap [7].

Following the implementation of the Bologna Process, the higher education structures in Europe are now more compatible and comparable. Implemented quality assurance systems contribute to building trust. Thus, higher education qualifications are becoming better recognised across borders. The three-cycle system (i.e. post-graduate (doctoral, residency or postgraduate art)), the use of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes, are fully or partly implemented.

Higher education is an open process in which students develop intellectual independence and personal growth alongside disciplinary knowledge and skills. The quality of higher education is becoming more homogeneous across the whole EHEA. The EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) has registered agencies that operate across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In future, the quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies should be widely applied to joint and double degree programmes.

STRENGTHENING MOBILITY FOR BETTER LEARNING

Learning mobility plays a great role in the process of quality assurance in higher education, expanding cross-border collaboration within the EHEA and beyond, and enhancing students' employability (Figure 2). Fair academic and professional recognition, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning, is at the core of the EHEA. It is a direct benefit for student mobility, improving graduates' chances of professional mobility and representing an accurate measure of the degree of convergence and trust attained [8].

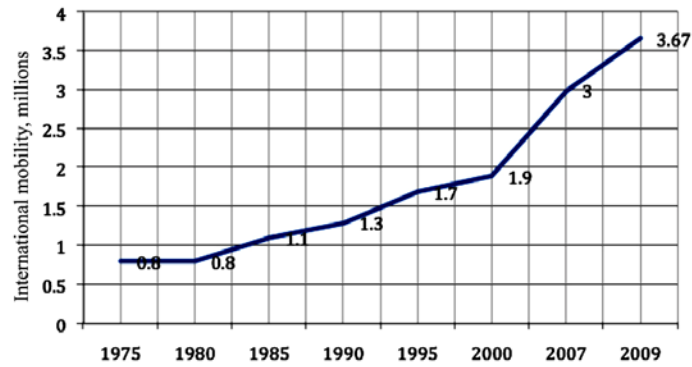


Figure 2: The dynamics of growth in the number of students that had studies abroad [9].

Co-operation with other regions of the world and international openness are key factors in the development of the EHEA. Lithuania strives to be an active participant in developing a global understanding of EHEA goals and principles.

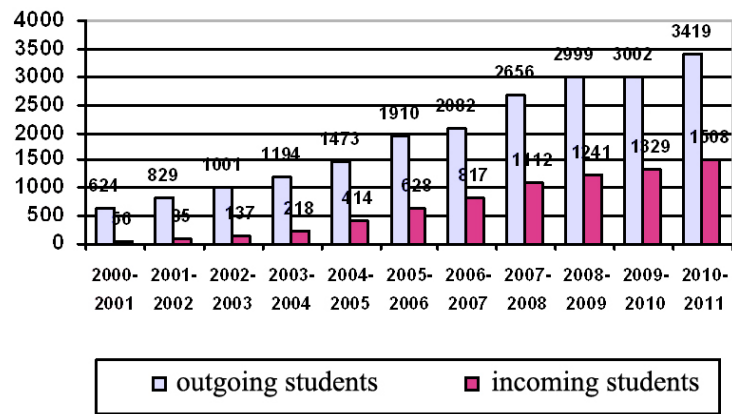


Figure 3: Lithuanian ERASMUS student mobility 2000-2011 [10].

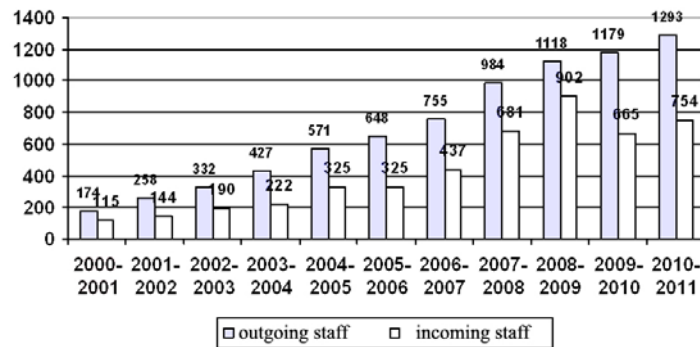


Figure 4: Lithuanian ERASMUS staff (teachers and personnel) mobility 2000-2011 [10].

The number of foreign students in Lithuania, from 2005 to 2009, have increased 3.5 times (Figure 3, Figure 4). Lithuania has more than 7,000 former Erasmus students and almost 3,000 former Erasmus teachers. Almost 5,000 persons were involved in Leonardo da Vinci mobility actions (an EU programme related to vocational education and training). Note that the EU Socrates Coordination Support Foundation and the EU Leonardo da Vinci Coordination Support Foundation were merged in 2007.

Lithuanian educational institutions participate in most EU educational programmes, i.e. Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, Transversal programme, Jean Monnet programme, Euroguidance (vocational guidance), Europass (common tools in Europe to present skills and qualifications), Erasmus Mundus (joint Masters degree and mobility), Tempus (educational reform development in the partner countries), Bologna Process (information about the common education area in Europe), academic exchanges (state scholarships for students and researchers based on bilateral agreements), NordPlus: Nordplus Junior, Nordplus Adult, Nordplus Higher Education, Nordplus Horizontal. More than 3,000 foreign students have chosen Lithuania for studies since 2000.

The Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes (both EU educational initiatives) provided one of the first opportunities for Lithuanian teachers and students to join European co-operative projects and participate in international mobility actions. This opportunity was accepted with great enthusiasm. The greatest number of incoming students are

from neighbouring countries (Latvia, Russia, Belarus and Poland) and Asian and Middle Eastern countries (Lebanon, Israel, Pakistan, China, Turkey, Jordan, etc).

Medical training and various engineering programmes are the most popular among incoming students and teaching staff. In Lithuania and many European countries (Estonia, Hungary, etc), the study fees are determined by each institution and may vary, from €1,000 to €7,000 per year. The fees may vary depending on the selected programme, e.g. medical training, aviation, and arts fees may be significantly higher compared to other study programmes. Students often pay more if they are from countries outside the European Union or the European Economic Area (EEA).

Dynamic changes in HEIs are not always supported by society and HEIs should strive to make higher education systems easier to understand by the public, especially by students and their families and by employers. The following aspects of EU education public relations should be considered:

- Most HEIs focus and concentrate efforts on a limited number of major geographic regions.
- At the national level, many of the European Higher Education Area countries have national agencies responsible for promoting national HE (e.g. Study in Lithuania; Study in the Netherlands).
- The marketing tools that are gaining increasing attention by HEIs are exhibitions and Web portals.
- The major message about European HEIs is based on keywords: quality of HE, secure study environment, quality of life, diverse and rich culture.
- So far, there is no common language used to spread HE publicity: European education still looks multifaceted, multi-structured, multilingual and diverse in terms of quality in different countries. Definitions and terms can have different meanings in different countries.

Taking into account European attempts to make European education more unified, an Australian network of agencies on the Internet and a portal titled *Help Your Country* could serve as good practice to be followed. Lithuanian HE delivery for overseas partners is not yet developed enough. For the widening participation in *Erasmus for All* activities, Lithuania should define the country's advantages for attracting foreign students, look at the image of the country through the eyes of foreign students and review the main motivators for students choosing the country for their studies. The *Study in Lithuania* campaign and Web portal launched within the national programme for the promotion of higher education abroad seems to be a very useful initiative, although rather late in comparison to other European countries' HE promotion campaigns.

LITHUANIAN AND AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION - DO THEY HAVE COMMON FEATURES?

The international dimension of Australian education is historically associated with the Colombo Plan (1950), which provided funding for thousands of Asian students to study in Australia. From the 1980s to the 1990s there was a strong growth in the number of foreign students. This created a unique Australian HE position between the HE of Western and Asian economies.

Over the past two decades, Australia's international education sector has grown fast (Figure 5). Education was the third largest export sector in Australia, generating \$US11.6 billion in 2009 in Australia, and creating about 125,000 jobs. Foreign students with the skills and competencies required by the Australian marketplace are encouraged to remain in, or return to, work in Australia.

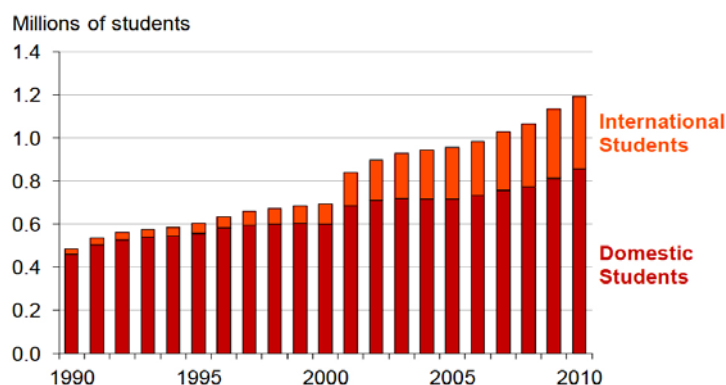


Figure 5. Enrolment of domestic/foreign students in Australia [11].

Australian HE has a national qualifications system in the Australian qualifications framework (AQF), which includes all qualifications in Australia. Also, there is a system for recognising qualifications achieved abroad operated by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR). With such a fast growth of Australian HE internationality, Government policy and programmes aim to ensure high-quality training, and good living and working conditions for students, hence, helping to achieve sustainable development in the education sector. International education services are

governed by the Education Services for Overseas Students act (ESOS), covering consumer protection, quality assurance of services and assistance to the students.

In the Australian case, the emphasis is on attracting students from developing countries and actively striving for co-operation with HEIs in its region. The creation of joint degree study programmes, implementation and development of students' and teachers' exchange programmes and the establishment of study units in the developing countries are the basic co-operative measures between a developed country such as Australia and emerging economies. Australian HEI offers up to 26,000 study programmes taught in English. It is important to note that if the highly abundant intensive English language courses are counted, the number would be 102,000. International Studies in Australia is a large source of export revenue for the economy. It brought in \$11.7 billion in the period, 2006-2007, and this result is highly regarded and analysed by other countries seeking to similarly develop their education.

In seeking to enhance the internationalisation of Lithuanian higher education, the country has to strengthen its identity in the global education system and define its strengths. These should be expressed as forming a bridge between West and East and EU member states; a blend of western experience and eastern potential; excellent study quality/price ratio, etc. It is necessary to form a clear image of the country; to set the strategic directions and goals of the national HE strategy; and to communicate consistently the strengths of the country at the international, national and institutional levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn:

1. In the context of the new programmes and schemes launched to support the internationalisation of higher education, the competition is becoming ever more intense not only between institutions, but also between countries. When developing co-operation with non-EU countries within the *Erasmus for All* programme, the educational profile of a country might be crucial in determining successful co-operation by individual HEIs.
2. A clear positioning of a country and identification of its strengths should be given special consideration. The image of the country, e.g. educational system, study and living standards, and migration policy, have to be emphasised to win the attention of both international partners and prospective international students.
3. This is particularly true for Lithuania. Lithuania should use publicity and marketing to primarily target major countries that are the sources of its international students (neighbouring countries, newly independent states, Turkey and China).
4. A national strategy (with major strategic directions, priority activities for HE internationalisation, national financing, etc) is needed to support Lithuanian HEIs in co-operative endeavours and in competitive efforts, taking account of the new European initiatives and aimed at non-EU regions.

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