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## **Internationalisation in EU Higher Education: Between national concerns, EU internal policy and global ambitions**

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### **Abstract**

The chapter will provide a brief overview of European higher education internationalisation from a historical perspective. Its focus is on EU level policies and instruments, contextual developments and the inter-governmental process that resulted in the on-going construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area.

Intergovernmental agreements between Member States materialised in the Bologna Process in 1999 (with which the European Commission was ultimately associated), and subsequently the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010. The purpose of the Bologna Process was to enhance the competitiveness of European higher education through the transparency and comparability of education systems. Currently the EHEA includes 48 countries, thus going well beyond the 28 EU Member States.

From the early 2000s, EU education started to emerge as a policy linked to other EU policy agendas - the Lisbon Agenda (in 2000) and the Europe 2020 Strategy (in 2010) to make Europe a more competitive economy in the world able to attract global talents to the European continent. The international dimension of education policy was supported through the Erasmus Mundus programme launched in 2004. Later in 2013 the EU issued its "European higher education in the world" strategy (European Commission, 2013), and launched a number of education policy dialogues with key countries and regions such as all individual BRICS countries.

More recently as a response to Europe's growing social and democratic challenges, higher education institutions have been called upon to be more inclusive, to engage more actively and be better connected to the needs of their communities. The 2017 Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education (European Commission, 2017) seeks to address this social dimension while at the same time addressing the economic challenges of the times ahead.

### **Keywords**

EU policy – globalisation – modernisation – transnational education – inter-national mobility

## **Different Times, Different Responses**

The European Union is currently being tested in many different ways, not least by the challenges of the UK Brexit, one among several examples of some inward-looking and populist views in the EU. These protectionist views are at the opposite of the very essence of the European construction and endeavour for an open and democratic society built on peace. There is the perception of a disconnection between the local, the European, and the global agenda, which also affects higher education.

In the current turbulent times, the tremendous achievements of the EU as a unique model developed on European continent since the fifties, and the European higher education in particular, should not be forgotten. Even if higher education policies are decided by every Member State in accordance with the EU subsidiarity principle, and not by the EU itself, the supporting and coordinating role that the EU has been playing has led to major structural transformations in higher education. EU objectives have been taken forward in action programmes and non-binding forms of cooperation to share best practice, achieve common goals and periodic monitoring. The various forms are grouped under the Open Method of Coordination (the OMC), which was first proposed by the Heads of State (the ‘European Council’) in the Lisbon Declaration in March 2000 (European Council, 2000).

Higher education systems and individual institutions have seen significant transformations, as a result of intra-European and cross-border cooperation, first at the grassroots levels through academic and student mobility. These have been instrumental for the initiation of major curriculum reforms and the development of new forms of teaching and learning, through double or joint degree programmes, as well as other forms of blended learning, either through partnerships with industry, or as virtual delivery, which both emerged at a later stage.

From the late nineties governments in the Member States started to get more involved in education as intra-European cooperation was seen for its potential to achieve structural reforms and the modernisation of higher education systems in Europe. It is therefore no surprise that four countries came together in 1998, followed by others at a later stage, with the European Commission coming on board as a formal actor, to discuss ways in which mobility could be facilitated across the European Union for the purpose of education, through better understanding, transparency and comparability of national higher education systems, which led to the Bologna Process.

The intergovernmental nature of the Bologna Process reflects the sensitivity and importance of education in general for the preservation of States’ interest, identity and economic prosperity. Preserving the rich and diverse culture of higher education systems while ensuring an acceptable degree of compatibility and comparability has been one of the key issues accompanying the Process of integration of European Higher Education. Protecting institutional autonomy and academic freedom has been vital in this. The London Communiqué (2007) reflects this concern by highlighting the importance of “*institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities and democratic principles*” (p. 1). The internationalisation drive promoted by the Bologna Process and the required trust-building and compatibility mechanisms<sup>1</sup> gave the Ministers of higher education an additional tool to gain support for higher education modernisation reform efforts at home.

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<sup>1</sup> Among them quality assurance and transparency instruments, the adoption of the three-tier system, and national and European qualifications frameworks.

The European Commission has always played a pioneering and foresight role in higher education, to stimulate innovative approaches to education through the cross-cultural dialogue between individual Member States and universities. At the same time EU policy has had to adapt to major challenges such as the 2008 economic crisis which led to new policy to stimulate the development within education programmes of skills highly relevant for the (global) labour market, or education policy addressing issues of global competitiveness yet at the same having a local impact in the Member States, responding more explicitly to social and democratic challenges. New challenges related to the digital revolution, a growth of inequalities, a shrinking of the middle class, an ageing population in Europe, youth unemployment, and a skill mismatch have led to rise of populism, emerging economic protectionism and growing tensions in Europe which have also called for new responses by higher education to demonstrate societal relevance.

### **An intra-European Mobility Scheme – The Launch and Growth of the Erasmus Programme**

The Erasmus programme began in 1987 in 11 countries. From the first Erasmus exchanges to the current credit and degree mobility that has expanded to include 33 countries<sup>2</sup>, more than 4,400,000 students (European Commission, 2018a) have benefited from the Erasmus programme in a period of just over 30 years.

However, if one compares the Erasmus mobility to the total student body for the 28 Member States, the percentage of EU-funded mobile students is 3.7% of young people (European Commission, 2018a). In 2016 bachelor students with mobility under Erasmus+ accounted for 55% of all credit mobility while 44% did so under a national mobility programme or out of their own initiative (Eurostat, 2019). Such mobility was very rare pre-Bologna as the question of recognition hampered the opportunities to study abroad.

The launch of the Erasmus programme saw the emergence of the first European networks of universities (such as the Utrecht, Unica and Coimbra networks) that grew out of Erasmus academic and student mobility, and over the years contributed to the European-wide “stakeholders’ conversation” and advocacy on EU policy in higher education and research.

Through its Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes the European Commission supports international mobility of students, academics and staff, as well as institutional collaboration. Erasmus+ is the most widely available mobility programme in the EHEA. At least a third of the €16.3 billion budget is earmarked for higher education and 2 million staff and students are expected to benefit in the 2014-2020 period (European Parliament, 2019). In 2017 alone the programme supported 800,000 international placements including higher education and vocational training students and staff, youth and youth workers. Half of these placements were granted to higher education students and staff (ICEF, 2019).

More than half of all credit mobility in the EU takes place under Erasmus+ or other EU programmes; 312,300 higher education students and 62,500 staff benefited from a mobility period under Erasmus+ in 2017 (European Commission, 2018a). The most popular destinations for student and staff mobility under Erasmus+ are Spain, Germany, the UK, Italy, and France. The top sending countries are Spain, Germany, France, Italy and Poland (European Commission, 2018b). Roughly a third of students from abroad studying higher education in Europe come from Asia, making it the highest sending region of mobile students to the EHEA (Eurostat, 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> 28 EU Member States, Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. In addition, the Erasmus+ programme is open to the rest of the world through partnerships.

Germany, France, Ukraine and Italy have the highest numbers of outward degree mobile students<sup>3</sup>. The overwhelming majority of students (about 80%) choose to stay within the EHEA. Those who decide to go outside the EHEA for their entire degree are mostly students from the UK, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and Spain. Together these top six countries account for almost two-thirds of this type of outward flow (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a).

The most popular destinations for degree mobile students are the UK, France and Germany. Together they account for a third of inward degree mobility from EHEA countries and over half of students coming from outside the EHEA. Russia, Austria and the Netherlands also receive a considerable amount of inward degree mobile students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a).

In 2013, the Ministers of Higher Education agreed on a target that by 2020 at least 20% of graduating students should have had an experience abroad. Even though some countries have achieved this target, according to the latest Bologna Implementation Report (2018) it is not yet possible to estimate whether the target will be met collectively.

Despite these numbers there is a still limited amount of student mobility at the level of the entire EHEA student population, which accounts for less than 4%. According to the latest Bologna Implementation Report, the main obstacles to mobility are financial issues, organisation of programmes, language skills, recognition issues and information provision. Mobility funding seems to be the most significant barrier to mobility, and to help tackle the issue, the portability of grants and loans is now high on the agenda. In addition, the European Commission introduced in 2015 the Erasmus+ Master Degree Loans (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018b). These low-interest rate loans are meant to help cover tuition and living expenses. No collateral is required as the loans are guaranteed by the EU and offer favourable pay-back terms whereby graduates benefit from a grace period of up to two years after graduation before repayment. Students can receive a loan of up to €12,000 for a one-year Master programme and €18,000 for a two-year programme. Currently this scheme is only available for residents of Spain, Italy, Croatia, Romania and Turkey, but this list is expected to grow (European Union, 2019b).

Thirty years ago, the focus was clearly on student mobility, possibly for credit acquisition. Yet at the end of the nineties, reactions emerged calling for more attention to those students who for their own reasons could not spend a period abroad. The question was raised whether the intercultural experience gained during student exchanges could not somehow be replicated for non-mobile students. This led to the concept and support for forms of “internationalisation at home”. The rationale behind the concept was that graduates would work in an increasingly interconnected and globalised world as professionals and citizens, and that the curriculum had to prepare them better for a labour market that was looking for global professionals with the right social behaviours to act as responsible citizens, have the capacity to solve complex problems and communicate effectively in increasingly multicultural local and global contexts.

Although the content of Erasmus has varied over the years, there have always been three main groups of action, i.e. grants for student mobility, grants to “internationalise” university staff (short study visits and teaching exchange visits), as well as grants to support the “Europeanisation” of higher education more generally (for example with large university thematic networks that focused on curricula updates in particular disciplines, and support to develop different forms of transparency instruments or qualifications systems). The

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<sup>3</sup> Students who undertake the entire degree programme, from enrollment to graduation, in another country.

programme has now major brand recognition and has underpinned the Bologna Process, as well as most other transnational activities in higher education in Europe.

### **Beyond Mobility: Reforming Higher Education in Europe and Engaging Globally**

The early EU intervention in higher education under Erasmus developed further into structural reforms with the Bologna Process. Launched with the Bologna Declaration in 1999 as an overall architecture and framework to increase transparency in higher education, it now includes 48 States which compose the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The Process was originally an intergovernmental intervention of only four Member States (France, Germany, Italy and the UK). With the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 they called on other European countries to join forces in addressing a number of issues regarding their higher education systems. The underlying driver was clearly to create a distinctive high quality European higher education through international activities. Signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration were invited to achieve a series of practical objectives, originally with little supervision. The Bologna Process quickly became highly successful as it enabled countries to make progress with their own reforms in higher education. The mechanism of external pressure assisted national higher education reform efforts by stimulating support at home. The Commission had been intentionally excluded by the founding countries, however, by the Ministerial meeting in Prague in 2001 it became clear that some additional support was needed for the Process, and the Commission became an influential player (Bologna Process, 2001).

Six key areas were covered under the original Declaration, i.e. the adoption of a system of easily readable degrees (including with the proposed Diploma Supplement), the end of the long first degree that existed in many European countries in favour of “*two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate*” (Bologna Process Committee, 1999, p.3), the adoption of a credit system (i.e. the *European Credit Transfer System* first developed under the *Erasmus Programme*), the promotion of mobility (students, academics and support staff), the development of European cooperation in quality assurance, and the promotion of the European dimension in Higher Education (in curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation and integrated study programmes). Further action lines have been added over the years, i.e. employability, social policy, qualifications frameworks, fair recognition of degrees, equal access, alignment with national lifelong learning policies, flexible learning paths, global dimension, and more recently learning and teaching relevance and quality, to name a few. Doctoral education was formally introduced as the third cycle of the Process in 2003 (Bologna Process, 2003).

Since its inception, the Bologna Process has always had international ambitions that go beyond Europe. Strengthening worldwide recognition, attractiveness, and competitiveness of Higher Education Systems (HES) (Bologna Process Committee, 1999) was always stated as part of the objectives, which could be achieved by promoting Europe as a study destination, . Another aim was to foster the recognition of European degrees across the globe, with robust quality assurance systems seen as critical for external credibility. It was also seen as a way to support social, economic and political developments in countries outside Europe, and to position the EU as a global player.

The key driver was to position Europe as a global reference point for quality in higher education which has driven the development of joint and double degree programmes as a distinctive European added value. Support for student/scholar mobility was provided as a

means to attract talent to Europe, enable them to gain valuable experiences and better prepare them to live in a multicultural knowledge-based society.

The launch of Erasmus Mundus in 2003 linked the concern for quality and the rise of international cooperation in higher education, driven by international actors, technological change, globalisation and competition, as well as institutions and scholars' eagerness to explore new opportunities. It opened up new forms of teaching and learning and developments of partnerships.

The 2005 Ministerial Summit formally introduced "*The Global Dimension of the Bologna Process*" when the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) was mandated to explore and develop an external dimension strategy to increase mobility and cooperation with non-EU countries (Bologna Process, 2005). As a result, "*A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process*" was introduced in 2007.

The influence of the Bologna Process in other parts of the world depends on interests and perceptions. Countries that seek EU membership are eager to comply with the reforms, while countries interested in EU funding opportunities through programmes such as Erasmus+ are inclined to adopt the recommendations. On the other hand, there are some that view the Bologna recommendations as a new form of colonialism and are less eager to participate. Furthermore, the concern of another set of countries with the Bologna Process is limited to how it affects the global trade in Higher Education and mobility of international students such as in Canada or in New Zealand (Klemenčič, 2019).

The positioning of the EU as a global player through the desire for intercultural dialogue and understanding between people within Europe has long underpinned interventions in education and training as a vehicle for peace and stability. The EU five priorities in the field of higher education international cooperation are focused on promoting EU education and training as a centre of excellence, supporting modernisation efforts of partner countries, promoting mutual understanding and shared values, supporting internationalisation efforts, and improving quality of education and training through peer learning and exchange of best practice.

The geopolitical realities of globalisation and the roles played by governments in that process have always been understood. Therefore, the European Commission initiated Policy dialogues that take place through different types of fora, such as seminars, conferences and studies, bringing together experts and senior officials from the EU and the specific country or region. Currently, the EU is engaged in policy dialogue activities with Africa, Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, USA, as well as the Southern Mediterranean, Western Balkans and Eastern regions. These activities are meant to deepen cooperation, increase quality of education in Europe and partner countries through the exchange of best practice, and support partner countries in their higher education reform efforts (European Union, 2019e).

As a whole, implementation of the Bologna Process is still very uneven across the 48 signatory countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a), between the early adopters and the latecomers. Implementation is voluntary and there are no punitive measures for non-compliance. Recent histories, path dependencies, different levels of support, and the fact that different countries have joined the Process at different times have led to uneven implementation.

However, the framework exists and has facilitated major exchanges and cooperation in many different ways. Member States of the EHEA are committed to implementing the structural reforms necessary to achieve the agreed objectives. It is a successful example of a process which at first appeared independent of the EU, but which builds heavily on the Erasmus programme, and the related financial incentives provided to assist signatory

countries to bring diverse systems together, and to independently support the academic experimentation that was necessary, and as a result make it academically acceptable.

Beyond the support for the Bologna Process, in 2006 the Commission also launched the Modernisation Agenda to support three essential objectives for universities: greater autonomy, funding reform (leading both to additional financial autonomy and greater funding source diversification), and curricular reform (to adapt teaching methods and content to the needs of the labour market) (European Commission, 2006a). Internationalisation has also always been a high priority underpinning the Modernisation Agenda.

### **Higher Education and Research – European and Global Competitiveness**

For the first time the 2000 ‘Lisbon Strategy’ brought the Commission into the area of education policy as it was believed that education and training had to improve to support economic growth and competitiveness. The Commission and individual Member States started a conversation which led to the adoption of benchmarks, good practices and mutual learning exercises between individual Member States, for all levels of education and training through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

The European Semester was launched in 2010 to enable EU Member States to coordinate their economic policies and coordinate efforts towards the EU 2020 targets. The European Semester includes a monitoring of education and training policies and reforms and is one of the instruments under the European and Training 2020 Framework that was adopted in May 2009 to disseminate best practices in education policy and advance educational policy reforms at national and regional levels. Based on the lifelong learning approach, the Framework has focused on educational outcomes, from early childhood to adult vocational and higher education. It has four objectives to make lifelong learning and mobility a reality, improve the quality and efficiency of education and training, promote equity, and social cohesion and active citizenship. Out of its seven benchmarks, two focus directly on higher education, i.e. that at least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education, and at least 20% of higher education graduates should have spent some time studying abroad (Council of the European Union, 2009). In addition to the European Semester, other tools include Working Groups, Peer Learning Groups and counselling, an annual Education and Training Monitor, and stakeholders’ consultations (with among others a European Education Summit).

In 2010 the European Council had also just reviewed the state of competitiveness of the Union in response to the phenomenon of globalisation, and set out objectives for what it wanted to achieve by 2020. As a 10-year plan the Europe 2020 Strategy was proposed by the European Commission for the advancement of EU’s economy as a "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth", with greater coordination of national and European policy (European Commission, 2010). It gave the Commission a mandate to stimulate Member States to achieve sectoral targets, also including education.

In addition to competitiveness issues, labour market trends also forced the EU to pay more attention to education and training. It was clear that demographic shrinkages would start in Europe and would have a serious effect on the overall workforce size in some countries. In a global economy, attracting talented graduates for a well-qualified workforce was seen as critical to meet local labour market needs, all the more reason to attract talented people to Europe. Employment and competitiveness issues thus also underpinned at least in part the Commission’s support for higher education and research, that were considered as key to grow the knowledge economy.

In research, the idea of a European Research Area (ERA) was put forward by the European Commission in 2000, with its Communication “Towards a European Research Area” (European Commission, 2006b). The aim of the ERA was to enable researchers to move freely and work with excellent networks of research institutions, and to share knowledge effectively for social, business and policy purposes. It was also to open European, national and regional research programmes to support the best research in Europe, and to develop strong links with partners around the world for Europe to benefit from worldwide knowledge and expertise. There were two additional underlying aims: to attract the best talents to research careers in Europe, and to encourage Member States to spend 3% of their GDP on research, which was seen as a minimum for a competitive knowledge-based economy and society.

Achieving the ERA has been an ongoing process, however it is a good example of the way the Commission and Member States have joined forces to achieve goals that are political in nature, but would have been difficult to achieve by legislation alone. The practical implementation has taken place through the Research Framework Programmes and will be continued in the next 2020-2027 Research and Innovation Framework Programme, i.e. the Horizon Europe Programme, that will have a budget of 93 billion euros (European Union, 2019d).

Many initiatives have emerged to support the development of the ERA through collaboration and coordination of national and EU-wide strategies in innovation and research. These initiatives include public-private partnerships, joint programmes, platforms, and networks. One such initiative strongly supported by the EC are the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Technology (EIT) (ERA-LEARN, 2018). Created in 2008, the aim of the EIT is to strengthen the innovation capacity of the EU as an independent body bringing innovators and entrepreneurs in Europe together into the KICs. Dedicated to finding solutions for specific pressing global issues (e.g. climate change, sustainable energy, health, food innovation) these communities offer genuinely innovative education programmes in partnership with leading companies and higher education institutions, with an innovation and entrepreneurial focus. So far more than 50 innovation hubs have been created across Europe, over 2 000 new ventures launched (with 1.5 billion euros of venture capital raised) and 900 products and services created; some 2,300 students have graduated and more than 6,000 jobs have been created. The EIT is a key component of the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for research and innovation (European Institute of Innovation and Technology, 2019).

In higher education the principle of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was first mentioned in the Sorbonne declaration of 1998, and the Bologna Process took it a step further by setting out specific objectives to establish an EHEA “*within the first decade of the third millennium*” (Bologna Process Committee, 1999, p.3), centred around the areas mentioned earlier, i.e. a two-cycle system of easily readable and comparable degrees, a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), mobility recognition, European cooperation in quality assurance, and promoting the European dimension in higher education (i.e. curriculum, institutional cooperation, integrated programmes and mobility schemes). Ministers of Education agreed to coordinate their policies to reach these goals and have been meeting periodically ever since to assess progress and decide new steps to be taken.

Formally launched in 2010, the EHEA has come a long way since its inception, and significant progress has been made to meeting the initial goals, with the emergence of new institutional players, guidelines, frameworks, and topics of interest: The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Register for Higher Education (EQAR) have played a key role in quality assurance; a three-tier degree



system<sup>4</sup>, an overarching qualifications framework (QF-EHEA), and the Diploma supplement are used to ensure comparability and transparency; the ECTS users' guide and the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance and qualifications framework serve as guiding documents; and student centred learning is now more established, as teaching and learning has begun to gain momentum. Most notably the EHEA has emerged as a unique intergovernmental forum that also includes representatives from HEIs, faculty and students (Bergan & Deca, 2018).

### **New responses – A Renewed Agenda for Higher Education**

As new trends and challenges emerge, policies are refocused to address these. Skill gaps continue to persist, the nature of work is becoming increasingly complex, requiring creative, flexible, innovative and entrepreneurial graduates and mindsets to produce new solutions and position the EU as a key player in the global economy (European Commission, 2017).

The 2017 Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education is seeking to address the new challenges that the EU has been facing in the last few years. Framed in the context of a broader strategy to strengthen the European Pillar of Social Rights and to support young people, it recognises the importance of higher education in promoting a fair, inclusive, open and prosperous democratic society.

The Agenda identifies four action priorities: addressing skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skill development; encouraging inclusive higher education systems that are better connected to their immediate communities' needs; boosting the higher education contribution to innovation; and improving efficiency and effectiveness in higher education systems. To stimulate progress in these areas the European Commission together with the OECD is reviewing the incentives and reward structures for higher education systems, supporting evidence-based policy-making, ensuring financial resources are available<sup>5</sup>, and promoting international mobility and cooperation to increase quality (European Commission, 2017).

In the future, the EHEA is foreseen as a part of a European Education Area (EEA) envisioned for 2025. The EEA will encompass the entire education and training system. It aims to foster a strong sense of European identity, where speaking three languages is the norm, and spending time abroad for education or work purposes is standard (European Union, 2019a)

Under the framework of the EEA, three key actions relate to higher education: the development of a European digital student card, automatic diploma recognition, and the creation of a Network of European Universities (European Union, 2019a).

The European Universities Initiative is one of the most exciting developments shaping the future of the EHEA and the ERA, meant to bring forward the European universities of the future. Early in 2019, the first European Universities were selected, i.e. seventeen consortia out of a total of fifty-four submitted applications.<sup>6</sup> These networks consist of bottom-up transnational alliances of universities, many of which already have a long historical collaboration. Alliances are required to include all types of higher education institutions and cover a wide geographical scope. They are meant to promote European values and 'revolutionise' European higher education. The initiative aims to support long-term strategies (20 to 30 years) and a deeper integration of these networks. Learning pathways should allow students to build their own learning programme and be genuinely mobile within

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<sup>4</sup> The third "tier" concerns doctoral education specifically and was officially added in 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Through Erasmus+, The European Structural Investment Fund, and the European Fund for Strategic Investment

<sup>6</sup> A second round is scheduled in the autumn of 2019.

the network. Strategies should adopt an interdisciplinary problem-based approach to contribute to solving Europe's most significant challenges. The initiative is now in its pilot phase, testing different models, and will be fully rolled-out as part of the next Erasmus programme in 2021-2027. A total of 20 European Universities are envisioned by 2024 (European Union, 2019c).

## **Conclusion**

Internationalisation in EU higher education is a fascinating construction of more than 30 years of EU education programmes and policy interventions, between the EU, its Member States and other parts of the world, bringing together all stakeholders, in bottom up and top down initiatives.

Major progress has been made to facilitate intra-European mobility in higher education through a more transparent European higher education that has been developing under the Bologna Process and all its associated tools. These have also facilitated links to other parts of the world, supporting the EU ambition to be a global player in higher education.

Academic and student exchange have led to study programme curricular transformations and novel forms of cross border and cross sector delivery modes for education, first piloted through EU-funded initiatives, then streamlined in a growing number of higher education institutions. Different forms of internationalisation have also contributed to major structural reforms at institutional and system level, in Member States and beyond in the European Higher Education Area.

In and outside the EU, education, research and innovation are seen for the key potential to contribute to (national) economic growth in a multicultural knowledge society, and for global competitiveness, hence linking them to broader policy agendas, including more recently in the EU to those related to social and democratic challenges.

All these achievements in the EU have not been without their challenges, and continue to be so. The many shortcomings need to be addressed on a daily basis. Yet through an ongoing and open dialogue at EU level, between Member States, higher education institutions, faculty and students, major changes can be made as has been seen in the shaping of EU education policy and programmes in the last 30 years.

There is strength in diversity and preserving the rich and diverse culture of higher education systems continues to be a local and global concern for higher education. In its interactions with other parts of the world, European higher education continues to address these challenges. Looking back at the results achieved through closer international cooperation there are many fascinating examples and success stories of positive changes in international higher education.

## Notes

1. Among them quality assurance and transparency instruments, the adoption of the three-tier system, and national and European qualifications frameworks.
2. 28 EU Member States, Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. In addition, the Erasmus+ programme is open to the rest of the world through partnerships.
3. Students who undertake the entire degree programme, from enrolment to graduation, in another country.
4. The third “tier” concerns doctoral education specifically and was officially added in 2003.
5. Through Erasmus+, The European Structural Investment Fund, and the European Fund for Strategic Investment.
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