The EC Communications, the Knowledge Society and Their Influence Over Higher Education

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Introduction

This chapter examines a series of communications by the European Commission (EC) to show how it shapes higher education policies in Europe. Its starting point is the work of Martens, Balzer, Sackmann, and Weyman (2004) who distinguish three dimensions of governance—by instrument (e.g. issuing legislation), by coordination (e.g. organising initiatives) and by opinion (e.g. generating visions and values that shape policy-making). Because the EC is bound by the Treaty of Maastricht, it cannot directly apply 'governance by instrument' in higher education but can use the other two methods. After a brief historical overview that

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describes the progressive engagement of the EC in higher education policies, the paper assesses its growing capacity to shape opinions and national and European policies through its influential communications; it then turns to how universities have responded to these developments through their collective representative body, the European University Association (EUA).

Dimensions of Governance

Martens et al. (2004) distinguish three dimensions in governance: governance by instruments, governance by shaping opinion, and governance by coordination. These dimensions correspond roughly to those of the classification proposed by Bemelmans-Videc and Vedung (1998), namely sticks (regulation), sermons (information) and carrots (economic means). To what extent does the EC deploy these three dimensions?

Governance by instruments 'encompasses the regulations to which states need to adhere due to their membership in the organization' (Majone, 1996, p. 230). This includes the capacity of passing legislation and the power of the purse, that is, the capacity to provide financial support. It is true that the Commission cannot resort to passing European-level legislation as education is protected by the subsidiarity principle (see Sin, Veiga, & Amaral, 2016). However, it can pass legislation in areas not protected by the subsidiarity principle, which have an indirect influence over education, such as the Services Directive.

Governance by coordination is the 'ability of an international organisation (IO) to provide the means of organising and handling procedures which promote certain initiatives in a policy field' (Martens et al., 2004, p. 2), which includes 'managing, directing and speeding up programmes and projects' (ibid.). The role of the Commission in the implementation of the Bologna Process is a good example of governance by coordination. Initially excluded from the Sorbonne meeting, and even not allowed to sign the Bologna Declaration, the Commission was invited to join the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) under the Swedish presidency as it was necessary to have a coordination organ.

Governance by opinion formation is the capacity of an IO to 'initiate and influence national discourses on educational issues' (ibid.) by laying down a set of distinctive norms and practices, grounded in what is desirable and appropriate (Henderson, 1993). It sets out the role institutions should assume in developing and handing on those norms that cause actors in a given community to switch to the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998). Given the Commission's restricted capacity of statutory intervention—passing European legislation is not possible—the use of communications stands as an exhortation and persuasion vehicle by which the Commission takes position and exerts influence on member states' higher education policies (Sin et al., 2016).

In this chapter, we analyse how the Commission uses communications to govern by opinion formation. Communications make public and promote the Commission's vision for higher education and, as such, are policy instruments based on information. Following Vedung, information is not to be understood exclusively as objective knowledge and facts; it also covers 'judgements about which phenomena are good or bad, and recommendations about how citizens should act and behave' (Vedung, 1998, p. 33). Keeling (2006, p. 209) described the Commission's discourse on higher education as 'a widening pool of "common sense" understandings, roughly coherent lines of argument and "self-evident" statements of meaning about higher education in Europe'—all features indicative of its normalisation.

A Brief History of European Law

European law has limited the prerogatives of the EC in matter of higher education (it is not the case for research, which is not the focus of this chapter, although this is addressed in passing). However, the Commission has used available opportunities—particularly the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy—to shape and influence European higher education policies.

From the Treaty of Rome to the Treaty of Maastricht

The role of the EC in the definition and promotion of education policies has always been a contested matter. Initially, it was agreed that its intervention would be limited to the area of vocational training (Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome):

Article 128

> The Council shall, acting upon a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market.

However, the rulings of the European Court of Justice considered that higher education, in general,was also a form of vocational training. In the Gravier and others vs. city of Liège case (case 293/83), the European Court of Justice referred to vocational education as follows: 'any form of education which prepares for a qualification for a particular profession, trade or employment or which provides the necessary skills for such a profession, trade or employment is vocational training whatever the age and level of pupil or student'. In the Blaizot vs. University of Liège case (case 24/86), the Court maintained this sweeping definition of vocation education, the only exceptions being 'certain special courses of study which, because of their particular nature, are intended for persons wishing to improve their general knowledge rather than prepare themselves for an occupation'.

These rulings of the Court, combined with the new possibility of enforcing legal acts by majority vote, substantially increased the power of the Commission in the higher education sector. The Commission took advantage of this situation to present the *Memorandum on higher education in the European Community* (European Commission, 1991). This was probably too much for the Member States who feared an increasing intervention of the Commission in what was traditionally an area of national sensitivity (Gornitzka, 2009). Therefore, the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, reconsidered the idea of a common vocational training policy and proposed instead:

Article 126

1. The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.
   ……

Article 127

1. The Community shall implement a vocational training policy, which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training.
   ……
4. The Council, acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189c and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, shall adopt measures to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.

The Treaty of Maastricht clearly protected higher education, which was maintained under the exclusive political control of the nation state and even excluded any attempt at the harmonisation of national laws and regulations. However, in the late 1990s, the field of higher education policy came suddenly to the fore due to a number of initiatives such as the Sorbonne declaration, the Bologna Declaration and, above all, the Lisbon strategy.

The Sorbonne Declaration, the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process

The Sorbonne *Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system*, signed by the four Ministers in charge of higher education from France, Germany, Italy and the

United Kingdom in Paris, in 25 May 1998, solemnly stated that 'Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well'. Almost one year later, on 19 June 1999, the Bologna Declaration went further by stating:

> A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

In April 2000, the European Council held a special meeting in Lisbon to agree a new strategy for the European Union (EU), aiming to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy. This became the well-known Lisbon strategy, which promised to transform the Union into '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' (Lisbon European Council, 2000). However, for some, 'Lisbon looks like the quintessential contemporary utopia' (Creel, Laurent, & Le Cacheux, 2005, p. 4), while others (Iversen & Wren, 1998) argued that offering simultaneously employment, income equality and fiscal restraint was just impossible.

The emergence of knowledge-based economies makes a well-educated workforce the major resource of the post-industrial society and explains why the Lisbon strategy, aiming to implement a knowledge-based economy, had a pressing need to include a component of human capital development (Lisbon European Council, 2000):

> People are Europe's main asset and should be the focal point of the Union's policies. Investing in people and developing an active and dynamic welfare state will be crucial both to Europe's place in the knowledge economy and for ensuring that the emergence of this new economy does not compound the existing social problems of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment.

The Lisbon strategy was a heaven-sent opportunity, allowing the Commission to play a more important role in higher education policies that were apparently protected from Brussels influence due to the subsidiarity principle. This allowed the Commission to come back into play after the initial flop of the *Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community* (European Commission, 1991).

In 2002, the European Council approved a *Detailed work programme for the education and training systems in Europe* (European Council, 2002) aiming to bring 'coherence to the various sectoral policies in education and training while respecting the input and the particular focus of each' (European Council, 2002, p. 6). The programme had three major strategic objectives: (a) improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems; (b) facilitating the access of all; and (c) opening the education and training systems to the wider world. The Commission proposed the application of the Open Method of Coordination[1] to education and training.

In parallel, the EC got involved in the Bologna Process, which strengthened the role it could play in higher education and its capacity to influence European and national higher education policies. This went against the political expectations of those governments who tried to use the Bologna process to overcome internal opposition to reform their higher education systems. As explained by Martens and Wolf (2009), some governments resorted to:

> international organisations not only to pursue substantial policy goals but also because it was in their strategic interest to use the intergovernmental policy arena to manipulate the existing distribution of formal institutional competencies in their domestic political systems. They thereby sought to enhance the sovereignty of their respective nation's executive in order to outmanoeuvre domestic opposition to their own policy goals. (Martens & Wolf, 2009, p. 77)

Contrary to expectations, the Bologna Process made the economic rationale 'more important than the political, educational and cultural rationales' (Huisman & Van der Wende, 2004, p. 350). Although the boomerang of instrumentalising the EU was intended to strengthen the initiating national governments at the expense of their domestic

institutional opponents, it landed in economic territory 'bringing a new rationale of degovernmentalisation to policies of higher education which is likely to weaken the role of *government* steering at all levels, including the national level' (Martens & Wolf, 2009, 87). And, as argued by Huisman and Van der Wende, the EU exerted tremendous influence, as 'national views on the role of higher education gradually grew closer—not necessarily intentionally—to the EC's perspective' (Huisman & Van der Wende 2004, p. 350).

Indeed, the Bologna Process was initially associated with the generous idea of a unified landscape of European higher education, honouring the European character of unity in diversity and looking beyond economic objectives. In the words of Rüttgers, 'higher education has to be connected to values… with the foundations of our western culture' (Rüttgers, 2013, p. 2). The Lisbon strategy, however, introduced an economic rationale to the creation of the European Higher Education Area, which ended up permeating the Bologna Process and distorting its loftier inspiration.

The EC Capacity to Shape European Higher Education: The Communications

Following the approval of the 2001 work programme (European Council, 2002), the Commission presented, in 2003, two communications: *Investing Efficiently in Education and Training: An Imperative for Europe* (10.01.2003) and *The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (05.02.2003). The first communication addresses the objective of 'making the most efficient use of resources' set in the *Detailed work programme on the objectives of education and training systems* (European Council, 2002), and analyses the implications of the Lisbon European Council's call for a substantial annual increase in *per capita* investment in human resources. This call was made more pressing by the 2010 work programme which aimed at making the EU 'a world reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training and (…) the most attractive world region to students, scholars and researchers', an ambitious objective already proposed in the Barcelona European Council (2002).

Investing Efficiently in Education and Training: An Imperative for Europe

The communication (European Commission, 2003a) recognises the need to increase the level of investment in human resources, although it shows that the gap between Europe on the one hand and the US and Japan on the other results mainly from a deficit of private funding, public funding being at the same level as in the US and higher than in Japan. However, the communication discusses ways of making investment more efficient by focusing on priority areas such as training and retention of education staff, new basic skills, ICT, social inclusion, guidance and counselling and avoiding inefficiencies such as high failure and dropout rates, graduate unemployment, low achievement levels, excessively long degrees and educational dead ends. Moreover, the communication considers that efficient investment needs to be anchored in the European context, which the Commission considers a critical factor for efficiency.

The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge

The second communication (European Commission, 2003b) presents a critical analysis of the problems of European universities which, in general, have less to offer and lower financial resources that their counterparts in developed regions of the world, such as the US and Japan. The Commission proposes 'to start a debate on the role of universities within the knowledge society and economy in Europe and on the conditions under which they will be able to play that role' (European Commission, 2003b, p. 2).

The communication lists a number of problems such as lack of sufficient and sustainable resources and a low level of private funding, lack of efficient management structures and practices, lower capacity than their American counterparts to attract students and researchers and to offer post-doctoral opportunities, absence of career prospects for young people from scientific and technical studies and difficulties with transdisciplinary work. The Commission considers it is necessary to reinforce the cooperation between universities and industries. Available data show

that only a very small percentage of innovative companies consider research institutes and universities as an important source of information; the creation of spin-off companies is considered insufficient and European universities in general do not have adequate structures for managing research results.

The European university landscape is still very fragmented, with a high level of heterogeneity, as it is primarily organised at national and regional levels, which is a challenge for the capacity of the Bologna Process to become an efficient instrument for organising 'that diversity within a more coherent and compatible European framework' (European Commission, 2003b, p. 5).

The Communication recognises the importance of universities for the Lisbon strategy and proposes several measures to make European universities a world reference, which include increasing the funding level of universities and providing multiannual budgets; increasing the efficient use of financial resources (decreasing dropout rates, avoiding mismatches between the supply and demand of qualifications, reducing the excessive duration of studies and eliminating the disparity and conditions of recruitment and work of pre- and post-doctoral levels); promoting a more effective use of research results; increasing the quality and efficiency of management; and promoting interdisciplinary capacity.

However, the document also contains some inconsistencies such as arguing, on the one hand, that 'the aims must be to bring all universities to the peak of their potential, not to leave some behind' (European Commission, 2003b, p. 16), while proposing, on the other hand, to create centres and networks of excellence with the 'concentration of research funding on a smaller number of areas and institutions [leading to] increasing specialisation of the universities' (European Commission, 2003b, p. 18).

Mobilising the Brainpower of Europe: Enabling Universities to Make Their Full Contribution to the Lisbon Strategy

In 2005, the Commission produced a new communication (European Commission, 2005). This communication reiterates the argument that 'European universities, motors of the new, knowledge-based paradigm,

are not in a position to deliver their full potential contribution to the relaunched Lisbon strategy' (European Commission, 2005, p. 2) and considers that European higher education faces three main challenges: achieving world-class quality, improving governance, and increasing and diversifying funding. And it concludes by proposing a modernisation agenda for universities.

The document identifies a number of important challenges, some of which had already been identified in the earlier communications, such as the pressures for uniformity in several Member States, difficult access of disadvantaged social groups to higher education, mismatches between graduate qualifications and the needs of the market, high unemployment rate of graduates in many European countries, administrative obstacles to mobility, lack of interdisciplinary research, deficient cross-fertilisation with the business community and society and a huge funding deficit for both education and research. The Commission clearly abandons, however, the idea that no universities should be left behind by proposing that 'research should be a key task of the systems as a whole, but not necessarily for all institutions', leading to 'an articulated system comprising world-renowned research institutions, plus networks of excellent national and regional universities and colleges which also provide shorter technical education' (European Commission, 2005, p. 4).

The Commission suggests a number of measures, such as achieving the major Bologna reforms by 2010, in order to promote mobility; ensuring real autonomy and accountability for universities which also need to be provided with new internal governance systems based on reinforced professional management; recognising the strategic importance of links with the business community; providing the right mix of skills and competencies for the labour market to enhance the employability of graduates; and reducing the funding gap. Other recommendations propose enhancing interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, reinforcing the dialogue with stakeholders, rewarding excellence to attract the best academics and researchers and making the European Higher Education Area more attractive.

In 2007, the Council of the EU adopted a resolution on *Modernising Universities for Europe's Competitiveness in a Global Knowledge Economy* (European Council, 2007). This resolution upholds the findings and recommendations of the Commission's communication.

Supporting Growth and Jobs—An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education Systems

In 2011, the Commission published a new communication (European Commission, 2011a), which does not contain significant new ideas. The communication, referring to the Europe 2020 strategy, considers that higher education 'plays a crucial role in individual and societal advancement, and in providing the highly skilled human capital and the articulate citizens Europe needs to create jobs, economic growth and prosperity' (European Commission, 2011a, p. 2). However, it considers once more that 'the potential of European higher education institutions to fulfil their role in society and contribute to Europe's prosperity remains underexploited' (ibid.). The Commission argues that to maximise the contribution of higher education to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, a number of reforms are necessary to increase the number of graduates, enhance the quality and relevance of human capital development, create effective governance and funding mechanisms and strengthen the knowledge triangle between education, research and business.

The Commission proposes a number of key issues for member states and higher education institutions. These include increasing student participation in higher education (attracting disadvantaged and vulnerable groups), reducing dropout rates, increasing the number of researchers by attracting more doctoral candidates and imparting research skills to the existing workforce. Improving quality and relevance of higher education is a recurrent theme closely linked to the need of aligning the curricula with labour market needs, occasionally involving employers and labour market institutions in the design and delivery of programmes. At the same time, researcher training also needs to be industry-relevant and coherent with the needs of the knowledge-intensive labour market, including the requirements of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Mobility comes again to the fore with the aim to 'attract the best students, academics and researchers from outside the EU and developing new forms of cross-border cooperation' (European Commission, 2011a, pp. 8–9). Creating 'close, effective links between education, research and business' (ibid., p. 10) is once more an objective associated with the development of entrepreneurial, creative and innovative skills and the

encouragement of the development of 'partnerships and cooperation with business as a core activity of higher education institutions' (ibid., p. 11). Lastly, the theme of improving governance and funding is addressed without new proposals.

The Communication also includes a reference to the EU contribution:

> The Commission can support transparency and excellence through evidence-based policy analysis. It can support mobility of learners, teachers and researchers. It can support strategic cooperation between European institutions and, in a context of increasing global competition for talent, provide a common framework to support the interaction of European higher education with the rest of the world. (European Commission, 2011a, p. 14)

The Commission equates evidence-based policy analysis with the implementation of U-Multirank, 'a performance-based and information tool for profiling higher education institutions' (European Commission, 2011a, p.15). However, sometimes very poor results of U-Multirank transforms this suggestion into a sad joke.[2] Mobility promotion encompasses the traditional ERASMUS and Erasmus Mundus programmes and there is a proposal of a 'European Framework for Research Careers' (European Commission, 2011b), which is just another piece of European bureaucracy. Fostering the central role of higher education in innovation, job creation and employability will be regulated in the 2011 Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology, while the Marie Curie actions will include a European Industrial Ph.D. Scheme. As for internationalisation, the Commission makes a pledge to explore the possibility of designing a 'specific strategy for the internationalisation of higher education' (European Commission, 2011a, p. 21).

European Higher Education in the World

In 2013, the Commission issued a last communication (European Commission, 2013), which 'analyses the mutually beneficial opportunities offered by the broader international context and promotes,

where appropriate, the use of European processes and tools to a global audience' (European Commission, 2013, p. 2). After considering that many higher education institutions have defined internationalisation strategies primarily focused on student mobility, the communication argues that a comprehensive internationalisation strategy should include three areas: 'international student and staff mobility; the internationalisation and improvement of curricula and digital learning; and strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building' (European Commission, 2013, p. 4).

To promote mobility the communication refers to transparency and recognition of learning acquired elsewhere as a key priority, raises the problem of rules on immigration of third-country nationals and proposes to change 'Directives 2005/71/EC (on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of scientific research) and 2004/114/EC (on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, student exchange or unremunerated training) to make it easier and more attractive for non-EU national researchers and students to enter and stay in the EU for periods exceeding 90 days' (European Commission, 2013, p. 5). On the internationalisation and improvement of curricula and digital learning, the communication refers to the need of integrating a global dimension in the design and content of all curricula, increasing multilingualism and widening the use of digital learning with a special focus on the emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Lastly, the communication stresses the economic importance of international higher education and suggests that European higher education institutions should develop partnerships within and outside Europe, without ignoring cooperation with developing countries. Reference is also made to the importance of joint and double degrees.

The communication also refers to the EU contribution to the internationalisation of higher education by focusing on 'increasing the attractiveness of European higher education by improving quality and transparency; and by increasing worldwide cooperation for innovation and development through partnerships, dialogue and capacity building' (European Commission, 2013, p. 11). On the first objective, the Commission wants to improve the recognition of foreign qualifications, increase cooperation in quality assurance and complement information

to market Europe as a high-quality study and research destination. Moreover, the Commission insists in presenting U-Multirank as a tool to increase the transparency, comparability and benchmarking opportunities between higher education institutions, despite the obvious flaws of this instrument.

On the second objective, the Commission proposes to increase the support of joint and double programmes and the establishment of knowledge alliances, to pursue bilateral and multilateral policy dialogues with non-EU countries or regions, to support international capacity-building partnerships with non-EU countries and to strengthen evidence-based policy-making in the field of international education (hopefully not using U-Multirank).

The Position of European Universities

How did European universities respond to these developments? Two types of documents from the EUA are analysed: the responses to specific Commission initiatives and the declarations arising from the EUA conventions.

The EUA is an organisation of about 850 members (universities and national associations of universities) located in 47 countries. Its two decision-making bodies are the Council, which gathers the presidents and executive heads of national associations of universities, and the Board, which includes nine current and former university heads. The association seeks to ensure that the voice of universities is heard in European higher education policy discussions. EUA has reacted, on behalf of its members, to some of the Commission's communications and responded to its consultation exercises. Both the responses to the EC communications and the declarations resulting from the EUA conventions are prepared by the EUA Board and approved by the EUA Council. The conventions gather a good part of the EUA membership; they take into account Bologna Process developments, EC policy-making (on research) and pronouncements (on higher education) and international developments in higher education. Thus, they have a much broader scope and do not necessarily constitute a response to a specific EC position.

EUA's Positions

EUA's founding convention took place in Salamanca in 2001, at a time when the notion of creating European areas for both higher education and research was still very new and before a wave of reforms increased the scope of university autonomy in many European countries. The convention affirmed the following four principles:

- 'Autonomy with accountability': given the autonomy deficit that existed in 2001, the Salamanca participants voiced what seems like a basic demand today, namely that 'universities must be able to shape their strategies, choose their priorities in teaching and research, allocate their resources, profile their curricula and set their criteria for the acceptance of professors and students' (EUA, 2001, p. 7). This was in line with the EUA's mission statement at the time, which opened with the aim 'to promote and safeguard values and the case for university autonomy' (EUA, 2001, p. 1).
- 'Education as a public responsibility': this is about promoting access and fostering education for personal development and citizenship 'as well as short- and long-term social relevance' (EUA, 2001, p. 7).
- 'Research-based education': convention participants gave support to the creation of a European Research Area and emphasised the link between research and education.
- 'Organising (the) diversity… of languages, national systems, institutional types and profiles and curricular orientation' (EUA, 2001, p. 7), i.e. finding the right balance between diversity, on the one hand, and harmonisation and comparability, on the other.

Furthermore, the Salamanca convention identified 'Quality (as) the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the European Higher Education Area' (EUA, 2001, p. 8). These themes would resonate in subsequent EUA communications. Thus, two years later, the Graz Convention developed in more detail the Salamanca themes by stressing:

> (…) universities need (…) to ensure that they remain central to the development of European society by:
> - maintaining universities as a public responsibility,
> - consolidating research as an integral part of higher education,
> - improving academic quality by building strong institutions,
> - furthering mobility and the social dimension,
> - supporting the development of a policy framework for Europe in quality assurance, and, of course,
> - pushing forward the Bologna Process. (EUA, 2003a, p. 5)

Central to many of these aspects was the notion of institutional autonomy.

The same year, EUA responded to the EC's communication on *The role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (European Commission, 2003b) by emphasising the following aspects (and implicitly criticising the EC document for its economic rationale):

> *(…) the role of the universities in the wider debate on the construction of Europe, and the promotion of European values*, culture and linguistic diversity which we consider particularly important in the present international environment. When it comes to building Europe and ensuring the well-being of its citizens, we firmly believe that promoting cultural and social innovation is as important as the purely scientific and technical progress emphasised in the Communication. (EUA, 2003b, §2)

EUA criticised the EC communication for its loose use of the term universities, which, it argued, should be confined to the institutions awarding the doctorate, and for a skewed view of higher education systems focused on a limited number of top research-intensive universities. The association noted the imprecise use of international benchmarks and the need for Europe to '*develop a specific European approach*, and its own framework and models for its universities' based on diversity, shared European values, higher education as a public responsibility, equity and access, the link between teaching and research, quality, inter-institutional partnerships and networking (for joint degrees and research).

EUA also pointed to the need of preparing carefully the enlargement of the EU (it should be noted that EUA members at the time came from 45 countries in Europe) and laid down a picture of how the system should look like: 'the goal in Europe should be *to increase the number of universities which are excellent in what they do* in specific areas, and not merely to concentrate more resources on an increasingly limited number of institutions at the expense of the others' (EUA, 2003b, p. 13).

While acknowledging the economic rationale (particularly for the research activities), the EUA tipped the discourse towards a more humanistic view of higher education and demanded—once again—university autonomy, as well as a stable policy and funding environment in order to ensure that higher education was capable of responding to societal demands.

The Glasgow Convention, in 2005, marked a change in the EUA Board. The new leadership expressed a clear commitment to strengthening the governance and leadership of European universities. This was reflected in the title of the Glasgow Declaration *Strong universities for a strong Europe* (EUA, 2005). This third declaration, like the first two, underlined both a humanistic and instrumental view of higher education:

> Universities' multiple missions involve the creation, preservation, evaluation, dissemination and exploitation of knowledge. Strong universities require strong academic and social values that underlie their contributions to society. Universities share a commitment to the social underpinning of economic growth and the ethical dimensions of higher education and research. (EUA, 2005, p. 2)

In effect, the Glasgow Declaration appealed to policy-makers to ensure the appropriate conditions for universities to deliver on their policy agenda, as in the following statement for instance: 'Universities are open to working with society. Institutional autonomy and mission diversity are essential prerequisites for ensuring effective engagement' (EUA, 2005, p. 2). However, the Declaration also exhorted policy-makers to focus on the 'social dimension' when it stated:

> In refocusing the Bologna Process, universities undertake to give a higher priority to the social dimension as a fundamental commitment, to develop policies in order to increase and widen opportunities for access and support to under-represented groups, and to promote research in order to inform policy and target actions to address inequality in higher education systems. (EUA, 2005, p. 3)

The EUA reaffirmed the need to provide research-based education and welcomed the plan to create the European Research Council (ERC). It implicitly acknowledged that this new player would be changing the rules of the game and introduce more competition. Therefore, it recommended that policy-makers recognise the importance of research activities for all universities:

> Universities accept that there is a tension between the necessary strengthening of research universities and the need to ensure resources for research-based teaching in all universities. Governments are called upon to recognise the particular role of universities as essential nodes in networks promoting innovation and transfer at regional level and to make the necessary financial support available to strengthen this process. (EUA, 2005, p. 4)

The Glasgow Declaration also stressed the need to invest at a higher level in higher education. This issue became central two years later in EUA's Lisbon Declaration (EUA, 2007), which reiterated the same themes as in Glasgow, albeit witha new emphasis on internationalisation. The latter theme received a more important treatment than before (no reference in Graz, one reference in both Salamanca and Glasgow vs. three paragraphs in Lisbon) as an acknowledgment that the EUA—six years after its creation—was ready to play an active role internationally and recognised the growing importance of both internationalisation and globalisation for its members.

While expressing a commitment to democratic values (access and equity), the EUA's Lisbon Declaration tilted to a somewhat more instrumental view of higher education, although in speaking about universities in the knowledge society it purposely avoided referring to the knowledge economy:

> The central task is to equip Europe's populations—young and old— to play their part within the Knowledge Society, in which economic, social and cultural development depends primarily on the creation and dissemination of knowledge and skills… Universities therefore look forward to playing a pivotal role in meeting the innovation goals set by the Lisbon Agenda and in particular through their commitment to the European Higher Education and the European Research Areas. (EUA, 2007, p. 2)

University–enterprise partnerships also received a larger treatment in the EUA's Declaration, notably at the doctorate level:

> University-business collaboration is a process of 'Co-Innovation' with knowledge transfer seen as a core mission of universities. EUA will continue to work to improve the university-business dialogue including, for example, in relation to doctoral programmes and in helping to develop the EU-proposed European Institute of Technology (EIT). (EUA, 2007, p. 5)

The notion of collaborative doctorates was further promoted in the *Salzburg II Recommendations* for doctoral education:

> All stakeholders should engage in measures to facilitate cooperation between providers of doctoral education and the non-academic sectors to the mutual benefit of all partners. It is essential to create awareness about the qualities of doctorate holders as well as to build trust between universities and other sectors. Such trust is, for example, built on formalised but flexible research and research training collaboration between industry and higher education institutions, including joint research projects, industrial doctorates or similar schemes. (EUA 2010, p. 7)

By 2009, the impact of the financial and economic crises became evident in many parts of Europe as universities in some countries were starting to see drastic reductions of their budgets. The Prague Declaration (EUA, 2009) was written under the responsibility of yet again a new board. In the first part of the document, it targeted its message to policy-makers asking them to take a range of measures to alleviate the economic crisis, while 'The second part of the Declaration sets

out a long-term strategic agenda for universities identifying 10 factors that will determine [its] future success' (EUA, 2009, p. 3). To justify continued financial support for higher education, the Declaration started out by stating the 'humanistic' role of higher education:

> … through knowledge creation and by fostering innovation, critical thinking, tolerance and open minds we prepare citizens for their role in society and the economy and respond totheir expectations by providing opportunities for individual development and personal growth. Through research-based education at all levels we provide the high-level skills and-innovative thinking our modern societies need and on which future economic, social and cultural development depends. (EUA, 2009, p. 4)

Paragraph 2, however, appealed to decision-makers in setting out an instrumental view of higher education and talking of universities as 'motors for economic recovery':

> … by striving for excellence in teaching, research and innovation, by offering opportunities to diverse groups of learners, and by providing the optimal creative environment for the talented young researchers that Europe needs, universities are increasingly central to future growth and to the consolidation of Europe's knowledge society. (EUA, 2009, p. 4)

Two years later, the EUA membership met in Aarhus to celebrate EUA's 10th anniversary in the context of a deepening economic crisis and at a time when the EC set out its 2020 agenda, driven by great challenges (such as the energy crisis, the environment, etc.). The Aarhus Declaration (EUA, 2011) echoed the structure of the Prague Declaration by speaking about the humanistic view of higher education in its first paragraph, and balancing it with the next one, which states that universities are 'motors for economic recovery' (EUA, 2011, p. 1).

Now that the EC had identified the great challenges (European Commission, 2010), and given the financial crisis, there was an urgent tone to the Aarhus Declaration in appealing to governments to invest in the future by investing in higher education. The universities for their part committed to 11 goals, starting with 'widening access'to higher

education (EUA, 2011, p. 3). Many of these commitments had been expressed in previous declarations but they found slight variations as when the Aarhus Declaration spoke about the need to promote vibrant academic communities and to provide attractive careers to all university staff (EUA, 2011, respectively, pp. 3 and 5).

This was followed by the Antwerp Declaration (EUA, 2015), which basically reiterated the Prague Declaration. Universities had been hurt by the economic crisis; they could contribute to economic growth but they needed a stable policy framework and adequate funding. EUA also warned about growing funding disparities across Europe that hindered Europe's competitiveness and endangered the cooperation that was the bedrock of quality higher education and research.

Finally, EUA's response to the revision of the EU modernisation agenda (2016) reiterated the same arguments about the growing disparities in Europe in the context of a weakened Union, the need to increase funding of public higher education, and to be mindful of institutional autonomy (which had been eroded through the economic crisis). It proposed to focus on increasing access through lifelong learning and inclusiveness (notably of migrants and refugees), digitalisation of research and learning, prioritising global citizenship, strengthening the link between research and teaching, regional social and economic regeneration, and international cooperation.

Observations About EUA

It is clear from the preceding analysis that EUA's positions have had to avoid several pitfalls and overcome a number of constraints. The Association has sought to reflect a consensual view of all types of universities (from the most research-active to those that lack that capacity) that are the products of vastly different trajectories and political and economic circumstances. Thus, on the hot-button issues, it has not been unusual to have heated discussions within EUA's decision-making bodies that reveal a split between north and south or east and west. The results have been statements that reflect a compromise between somewhat opposing views. Furthermore, EUA's positions have needed to

avoid the charges that are systematically levelled at universities when they oppose policies, however misguided these might be: that these are defensive institutions, ivory towers, resistant to change, etc. Therefore, many EUA's statements appear to be endorsing the hegemonic discourse (i.e. an instrumental view of higher education) only to find that these are balanced by other statements that promote a more humanistic view of higher education.

To understand why the EUA's discourse shows quite a bit of continuity it is important to consider the changes that have occurred in Europe since EUA's creation in 2001. The most important change driver has been the economic crisis, which has had an effect not only on higher education budgets but also on European governance (with a renewed struggle between the EC and the Member States). Perhaps, because all the recent economic and political developments weakened the EC, its initiatives have not been as ambitious as they were at the turn of the twenty-first century and the Commission has tended to present the same proposals in a recurrent manner. The nature of European policy-making has been such that EUA has been bound to repeat over and over again the same principles and reaffirm the same values. The continuity in the message was also helped by continuity in the EUA Board membership for the past 15 years, with overlapping members who served in two different boards.

Conclusions

The role of the EC in European higher education has gone through several phases, with several ups and downs, but with the overall result of creeping competence. As argued by Amaral and Neave:

> Rarely does the European Commission concede defeat. Rather, it returns time and again with new proposals for the same agenda, tirelessly questing for, and alert to, the favourable opening that will allow it to slip past the sometimes lowered guard of member states whose opposition is neither persistent nor obdurate and still less systematic. (Amaral & Neave, 2009, p. 282)

The Bologna Process and the Lisbon strategy were just two of those favourable openings that have allowed the Commission to set a firm foot into the European Higher Education Area despite the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty. In this chapter, we have analysed one of the policy instruments used by the Commission: its communications or, as Bemelmans-Videc and Vedung (1998) call them, its 'sermons', which can be either affirmative (encouragements) or negative (warnings).

The Commission is worried with 'the perceived incapability of her [Europe's] universities to meet the fast-growing demand for higher-level skills and competencies, and research-based commercial technologies' (Olsen & Maassen, 2006, p. 3) and claims to know the recipe for solving the problem: 'The challenge for Europe is clear, but so is the solution' (Schleicher, 2006, p. 2). The solution lies in a new organisational paradigm, derived from the New Public Management and neoliberal reforms (Hood, James, Peters, & Scott, 2004) or, as argued by Commissioner Figel: 'We need a new model—we need something which can demonstrate to countries where university models still hark back to the days of Humboldt, that today there are additional ways of doing things' (Figel, 2006, p. 12). The proposed model 'emphasizes leadership, management and entrepreneurship more than individual academic freedom, internal democracy and the organising role of academic disciplines' (Olsen & Maassen, 2006, p. 8). However, there is little hard evidence showing that New Public Management reforms have successfully contributed to academic success (Amaral, Fulton, & Larsen, 2003, pp. 292–293).

The new model also proposes 'the differentiation of the functions of the higher education sector and the diversification of the activities of the university' (Dale, 2014, p. 25), 'with the first element of the knowledge triangle (skills, competences) being labour market-related and 'inward-looking' and the other two (interdisciplinarity and competition) research-oriented and operating in a global context, possibly to a point where the differentiation of the sector becomes more likely' (Dale, 2014, p. 34). Or, as argued by Olsen and Maassen: 'The Commission also opens for a further separation of teaching from research and for more differentiation and stratification among universities' (2006, p. 9).

The reform rhetoric pays far more attention to the knowledge economy than to the knowledge society. The Commission has a utilitarian view of higher education as a key element in a strategy of economic growth and competitiveness (Sin & Neave, 2016). Higher education institutions are supposed to supply the labour market with the graduates having the skills needed for the short-term needs of the economy. Research is seen as producing direct benefits for society, which explains the Commission's preference for applied research. As argued by Keeling, 'a key message embedded in the Bologna objectives and the EU's research policy is that higher education leads somewhere—for the individual and for wider society' (Keeling, 2006, p. 209)—even if Commissioner Figel felt the need to say 'I don't want to give the impression today that I see universities as a purely economic instrument' (Figel, 2006, p. 10).

For Keeling, the Commission propagates a discourse that constructs higher education as purposeful, its activities and outputs as measurable and higher education institutions 'as organisations like any other, participating in and competing on an open market, and measurable in terms which transcend the education sector' (Keeling, 2006, p. 209). This discourse leaves little space for other objectives of higher education beyond the economic ones, as proposed by Newman—socialising students for their role in society, encouraging social mobility and providing a safe place for disinterested scholarship and unfettered debate (Newman, 2000).

The Commission was able to combine the Bologna Process with the EU's research agenda as indispensable ingredients of the Lisbon strategy, which was reflected in a decisively economic-led agenda. Its policy texts present a view of higher education where 'knowledge is produced and then traded' while 'education is presented as a product, the researcher as a manufacturer, the student as a consumer, and ECTS credits as the currency of exchange' (Keeling, 2006, pp. 209–210). However, 'the Commission has still not articulated a coherent vision of European higher education… Driving concepts such as 'globalisation', the rise of the 'knowledge economy', the ageing workforce, international mobility and the 'information revolution' are presented variously (and vaguely)

as threats, as solutions and as context' (Keeling, 2006, p. 215), which makes the Commission's argumentation frequently inconsistent.

Furthermore, the Bologna Process has lost momentum, particularly since 2010. As this cooperation framework weakens, European higher education has seen the growing importance of internationalisation and global competition (partly signalled by the emergence of international rankings). This makes the work of EUA particularly challenging, as it tries to represent vastly different universities with different ambitions and capacities. Nevertheless, the principles enunciated in Salamanca have endured—autonomy, public responsibility, research-based education and diversity—even when EUA has had to find a compromise position, particularly with the deepening of the economic crisis. While embracing the instrumental view of higher education, EUA has nevertheless tried to hold on to these principles and to the humanistic values of higher education. Now that the economic crisis has been replaced by multiple political crises, the notion of global citizenship and a humanistic view of higher education are reappearing as one of the best ramparts to ensure a peaceful future and an opportunity to recognise the role that universities—everywhere and together—can play in meeting this formidable challenge.

Guy Neave (1995) warned about the risky nature of the activity of prophets and seers, as too short-span prophecies run the risk of being contradicted by reality, while too-long span prophecies run the risk of being seen as irrelevant. Making predictions about the future of the EU is indeed a risky business due to worrisome signs of disaggregation (Brexit) and increasing signs of discontent of many of its citizens. The economic crisis, the recent and still unsolved crisis of immigration, a sense of incapacity to deal with terrorism, the rise of populist movements against the Euro and even against the EU, the lack of solidarity and, in many cases, the lack of political tact of the Commission, all create a sense of discomfort. There is an obvious lack of confidence in the capacity of European politicians and institutions to solve the successive crises and to transform Europe in the promised 'most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment'.

It is in this time of uncertainty and disaggregation that universities may play an important role in the promotion of European ideals, offering a critical view of the present political difficulties and presenting new and innovative solutions. In his inaugural speech at the celebrations of the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna, Giovanni Agnelli (1988) argued that modern society is the final product of a stable relationship between universities and society and that our debt to the university is visible in our level of civilisation and well-being. Neave (1995, pp. 8–9) has written that 'the university was in the world but was not of it' and that this detachment from society allowed the university 'to entertain a view on society and its own part in it, sub *specie aeternitatis*—that is, from a long-term perspective. Put succinctly, the university was the major institution through which society, before an age of planning, viewed itself in a long-term perspective'.

However, to do this, the university must remain a social institution, avoiding the trap of being transformed into a mere social organisation (Amaral & Magalhães, 2003). This means that the university needs to avoid the trap of the Bologna Process that ended up promoting a utilitarian view of higher education as a key element in a strategy of economic growth and competitiveness (Sin & Neave, 2016), looking instead to more sublime objectives.

Notes

1. The Open Method of Coordination is a soft law mechanism used in the EU. The OMC does not produce binding agreements or rules and, as argued by the delegation theory, may under certain circumstances be an effective way for states to control their uncertainty over the future desirability of legal rules adopted today (Guzman & Meyer, 2009).
2. U-Multirank produced some unbelievable results in the Portuguese case. For instance, the best-ranked Portuguese university in research is a small public institution where more than 50% of the Ph.D. programmes did not get accreditation due to insufficient research production; and the best-ranked school of medicine is an institution with recruitment problems of medical academic staff. In its first edition U-Multirank even

placed a private university located in Porto as the worldwide leading university in regional relevance, which is the result of poorly chosen indicators. The indicator for regional relevance of publications is authorship by people from at least two institutions located in a radius of 50 km. While that university publishes mainly in Portuguese and there are many research institutions in Porto, one of the very regionally relevant polytechnics placed in isolated regions near the border of Spain does not have another research institution in a radius of 50 km. The indicator for funding considers the contribution of regional funds which, in the case of the mentioned private institution, come from the fees of students who are mainly local, while those public polytechnics get most of their budget from the central government, as there are no regions in Portugal.

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