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# Neo-nationalism and Universities

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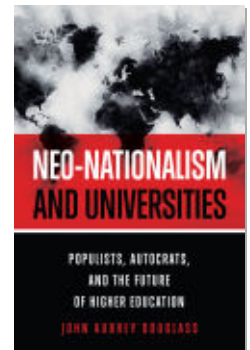
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# 6

# Neo-nationalism in the European Union and Universities

MARIJK VAN DER WENDE

> Our individual liberties are not givens. Democracy is not something we can take for granted. Neither is peace, and neither is prosperity. But if we break down the walls that hem us in, if we step out into the open and have the courage to embrace new beginnings, everything is possible.
>
> Angela Merkel, Harvard Commencement 2019

NATIONALISM IS NOT new to Europe; it has characterized some of its darkest periods in the twentieth century. But since the end of World War II, European countries have lived in peace and moved steadily toward cooperation and interconnectedness. Their shared economic and political interests converged in the European Union, eventually as a joint response to globalization. Higher education is part of the process and became part of that response, supported by the creation of the European Research Area (ERA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).[1] But the political winds seem to be shifting, and there are signs of a new age of populism and nationalism emerging in Europe—a development that challenges universities to rethink their social contract and missions in local, national, European, and global contexts, and that has real consequences.

This chapter discusses the character of current neo-nationalist movements in Europe and differing regional and age-related perceptions of the values of the European Union. Among many EU member

states, there remains significant support for the European Union and for ensuring mobility, particularly among younger people. But at the periphery of the Union, the dynamics are different, and that translates into significant challenges for universities. This raises a number of related questions. First, as students search for opportunities outside of neo-nationalist-leaning countries on the EU periphery, how are nations with open higher education systems, specifically the Netherlands and Denmark, coping with increased enrollment demand and the budget and policy challenges that feed nativist politics? Second, how are universities, and the European higher education community, responding to neo-nationalist attacks on academic freedom and university autonomy? And third, how are universities in Europe reacting to this changing political landscape of populism, and how might their leaders mitigate its impact?

## Neo-nationalism in Europe

The term *neo-nationalism* refers to the nationalism that emerged in the mid-2010s in Europe's political landscape and relates to anti-immigration and anti-globalization right-wing populism, protectionism, and euroskepticism. The fear of downward social mobility and the disproportional impact of globalization have fueled a political movement found throughout Europe.

In the Netherlands, right-wing anti-immigration parties such as the Centrum Party and later the Centrum Democraten emerged in the early 1980s. They dissolved after leaders were excluded from parliament and other "cordon sanitaire" strategies (similar to those in Belgium) were applied. In France, neo-nationalism gained strength when Jean-Marie Le Pen won a seat in the European Parliament in 1984. Since then, the Front National (called Rassemblement National since 2018) under the leadership of Le Pen's daughter has positioned itself as the anti-globalization party and champion of those who see themselves as its losers, manifested since 2018 as "les gilets jaunes." Anti-globalization evolved into an anti–European Union movement. France and the Netherlands surprised the rest of Europe in 2005 with an overwhelmingly

negative vote (55 percent and 61 percent, respectively) in the referendum over the new EU Constitution.

Since 2005, populist parties have experienced significant political gains in more European countries,[2] including in Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Sweden, and Denmark.[3] However, it is important to note that even though nationalist parties are on the rise, there is no universal trend toward nationalism within the European Union. Research finds that the increased visibility of nationalism in European politics is less attributable to a shift in global attitudes than to heightened political and social articulation of these attitudes via social media and political actors. The causes of this shift are country specific, but overall they are grounded in the resonance of anti-elite discourse and a crisis of liberal democracy.[4]

Contrary to what is often stated in the media, and as noted previously, among Europeans there is no significant negative trend in identifying with the European Union. Data from the autumn 2018 Eurobarometer reveal on average an upward trend in identifying with EU institutions (see table 6.1).[5] Overall the survey confirms that trust in the EU has risen considerably since 2015. On average Europeans trust the EU even more (42 percent) than their national government or parliament (both 35 percent). The overall image of the European Union has also increased significantly, which is likely related to its improved economic situation (49 percent consider it good) and related decrease in concerns about unemployment, which receives the lowest score (13 percent) in years (from 51 percent in 2009 and 2013).

Relevant to our discussion on the rise of nationalism, the data on identity, immigration, and freedom of movement displayed in table 6.1 are particularly striking. First, the highest proportion of people identify themselves as citizens of the European Union (71 percent); most express a dual European and national identity. Younger people express a stronger attachment to the EU than do the older generations. Second, concerns over immigration decreased strongly, although it still is the biggest concern, followed by terrorism and economic issues. Third, the free movement of EU citizens, who can live, work, study, and do business anywhere in the European Union, receives the highest level of support as

a policy priority (83 percent) and is seen much more as a positive result of the EU (59 percent) than it was in 2015 (only 25 percent).

These trends indicate that the European Union recovered from the downturns caused by a series of crises—the global financial crisis, euro crisis, and refugee crisis—since 2007, although the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains to be seen. More trust also indicates more confidence and expectation of the European Union providing solutions; for example, 69 percent favored a common European policy on migration, and 65 percent a common EU foreign policy.

These trends are based on averages for the European Union as a whole. It is important to look at the countries at the extremes of the spectrum. Smaller Nordic and Baltic states tend to be more on the positive end, while the United Kingdom, Greece, and some other countries in the southern and eastern parts of Europe appear rather frequently at the lower end. Even with the political tumult of Brexit, it is surpris-

*Table 6.1. Selected scores on topics relevant to neo-nationalism discussion (in percentages)*

| Indicator | EU 2018 | EU 2015 | 3 countries with highest scores | 3 countries with lowest scores |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trust in the EU | 42 | 32 | Lithuania 65 Denmark 60 Sweden 59 | Greece 26 United Kingdom 31 Czech Republic 32 |
| Overall positive image of EU | 43 | 34 | Ireland 64 Luxembourg 56 Bulgaria 56 | Greece 25 Czech Republic 28 Slovakia 33 |
| I feel like a EU citizen | 71 | 50 | Luxembourg 89 Germany 86 Ireland 85 | United Kingdom 58 Czech Republic 56 Greece 52 |
| Main concern facing the EU: immigration | 40 | 58 | Estonia 65 Malta 61 Slovenia & Czech Republic 58 | Romania 25 Portugal 30 United Kingdom 31 |
| Political priority with most support: free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study, and do business anywhere in the EU | 83 | n/a | Latvia 96 Estonia and Lithuania 94 | Romania 69 Italy 72 United Kingdom 74 |
| Most positive result of the EU: free mobility of persons to live, work, or study anywhere in the EU | 59 | 25 | n/a | n/a |

*Source:* Eurobarometer 2018

ing to see that only 31 percent of UK citizens see immigration as the main concern facing the European Union, which is well below the EU average of 40 percent, and that the free movement of EU citizens still has the support of 74 percent. The anti-immigration argument was used extensively in the Brexit campaign, but the concerns of UK citizens shifted to state financial and economic issues, which may actually be a result of the uncertainty in the lead up to a hard or soft Brexit. Brexit is also mentioned sometimes as a cause for more support for the EU in other member states.

A survey by the University of Amsterdam carried out in 10 EU members states prior to the 2019 elections for the European Parliament confirmed that only some 10–25 percent of the population want to leave the European Union, despite their criticism of the current functioning of EU institutions. Interestingly, Poland and Hungary were at the lower end, with only 10 percent who would like to leave the European Union.[6]

Even though nationalist parties are on the rise in Europe, there seems to be no major shift of attitudes toward nationalism, a negative trend in identifying with the European Union, or a decline in European supranational identity.[7] Florian Bieber notes that this appears at first contradictory. But it might be explained by the political, and social, articulation of nationalist attitudes that has changed, and the polarization that has shifted in support of nationalist candidates.[8] In addition, I would argue that in Europe, nationalist parties articulate and fuel such attitudes, but more generally national politics may do so, as many national political leaders tend to blame the European Union, or "Brussels," for all sorts of problems. Attempting to keep nationalist parties at the margins, various centrist political parties adopted some of the nationalistic policy agenda, for example, on protectionism or even patriotism,[9] and seem at times also to borrow from the anti-elite discourse.

Many feared the election of a wave of nationalist party candidates with their anti-EU agendas to the European Parliament in May 2019. The dominant centrist parties, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, saw their 53 percent majority diminished to 44 percent. However, together with the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats supported by President Emmanuel Macron's new party, and the Green

Party, the center, although more fragmented, still received the support of 76 percent of the voters. Euro-critical parties won less than feared and were scattered on both ends of the political spectrum. With a voter turnout much higher (51 percent) than in previous rounds (42 percent in 2014), the European Parliament strengthened its reputation as a public agora and representative body where all views are heard.

However, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic put the European Union's internal cohesion under great pressure and amplified existing internal tensions. With the virus outbreak in early 2020, all EU member states chose nationalist-protectionist solutions and closed their borders. The European Commission initially was unable to coordinate relief or provide much-needed medical supplies. Meanwhile, negotiations over the European Union's multiannual 2021–27 budget, complicated by Brexit, were overshadowed by much bigger tensions concerning solidarity between the North and the South, where countries were hit hardest by the pandemic. Their economic recovery became dependent on a substantial redistribution of the EU budget (€1,100 billion), as well as an additional package of loans and subsidies (€750 billion)—a deal negotiated during an exhaustive summit in late July 2020, under the remarkable leadership of German chancellor Angela Merkel.[10] The final agreement[11] was based on an initial and historic proposal by Germany and France, reached despite substantial concessions made to a group of smaller, high-GDP countries (Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Finland), also known as the "frugal" countries, led by the Netherlands.[12]

At the same time, events leading up to and during the pandemic did not affect support for the European Union negatively. Eurobarometer data from 2018 cited above emphasized EU citizens' high levels of trust in the European Union. This positive attitude was confirmed in 2019 Eurobarometer data, at the highest rates since 2014, and with higher trust in the EU than in national governments or parliaments.[13]

Further evidence is found in a dedicated survey, conducted in late April 2020, which focused on citizens' attitudes toward EU measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.[14] It showed that almost 6 out of 10 respondents were dissatisfied with the level of solidarity shown among EU member states during the pandemic. Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents

wanted a stronger role for the European Union in fighting the crisis. Around two-thirds of respondents agreed that "the EU should have more competences to deal with crises such as the Coronavirus pandemic." In responding to the pandemic, European citizens wanted the European Union to focus primarily on ensuring sufficient medical supplies for all EU member states, on allocating research funds to develop a vaccine, on direct financial support to member states, and on improving scientific cooperation among member states.

A survey taken in the same period by the European Council on Foreign Relations also found that although people in nine member states believed the European Union responded poorly to the crisis, large majorities in these countries also said that they were now more firmly convinced of the need for further EU cooperation than before the crisis.[15]

## How Are Universities Affected?

The plea for stronger cooperation within the European Union is, of course, a positive sign for the higher education sector, as well as for positive attitudes toward the EU, particularly among the younger population. The free movement of EU citizens to live, work, and study anywhere in the EU is viewed as the most positive result of the European Union and receives the highest level of support as a policy priority. The Erasmus Programme was rated the fourth-best outcome of the European Union, after peace and the euro. These opinions are crucial to sustain the beneficial conditions created in the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area and for continued financial support for cross-border collaboration, exchange, and mobility.

However, and as noted before, these trends reflect averages for the European Union as a whole. Perspectives may be quite different in the countries toward the extremes of the spectrum or otherwise more on the periphery of the EU. Universities located there have more at risk. As shown in table 6.1, the United Kingdom is a clear and rather dramatic example. The Brexit process substantially affected the higher education sector, including a 26 percent drop in European students coming to the United Kingdom in 2019.[16] A further drop of 25 percent is expected for

2020 as a result of the UK government's decision to end home fee status for the European Union, other European Economic Area (EEA) citizens, and Swiss nationals following Brexit.[17] European research staff began an exodus back to the Continent.

Hungary is another sobering example. Although scores on European identity (80 percent) and in favor of free mobility (81 percent) are relatively high in Hungary, immigration is seen as an important threat to the European Union (54 percent), combined with concerns regarding the national health and social security system (40 percent). Citizens may thus be easily mobilized against immigration. However, the political conspiracy built against George Soros as the founder of the Central European University, which eventually forced the CEU to leave the country, cannot be attributed only to a shift in civic attitudes. It is also an anti-liberal ideological campaign of the government's increasingly autocratic leadership, posing a threat to liberal democracy itself.

At the same time, other institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences, the Constitutional Court, the free press, and certain nongovernmental organizations were attacked by the Hungarian government led by President Viktor Orbán (see chapter 5). This caused the European Union to trigger Article 7 in 2018, a disciplinary procedure against Hungary for undermining democratic rules and being "a clear risk of a serious breach of the values referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union."[18] The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society in which pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail.[19]

Shocking experiences also emerged on the EU periphery. After a failed coup in 2016 in Turkey, officially a candidate for membership in the European Union,[20] thousands of university deans and faculty members were fired or arrested (see chapter 7). Even in more moderate countries with nonauthoritarian leaders, higher education has been caught up in political polarization. The Netherlands and Denmark are,

for instance, countries with overall moderate scores on the Euro-barometer indicators and with relatively high levels of trust in the European Union: 60 percent and 57 percent, respectively (although the Netherlands shows a striking rise since Brexit). Yet governments in both countries looked for measures to control or even reduce the number of international students at national public universities, and campaigns against teaching in English were launched.[21]

Another example is Switzerland, not in the European Union but a member of the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) and participant in ERA and EHEA. As a result of a 2014 referendum on immigration, Switzerland lost access to EU research funding (Horizon 2020) and mobility (Erasmus) grants.[22] The same may happen to the United Kingdom if it does break with the EU free movement principle, which is conditional on the EU side for such cooperation.[23]

Higher education in Europe is significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Academic mobility and cooperation activities under the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programs were frozen or delayed since the outbreak. As of August 2020, various borders between member states were closed. And EU budgets for higher education and research for 2021–2027 were substantially reduced.

## Consequences for Open Higher Education Systems

Neo-nationalist and populist movements, combined with the EU principles of the free movement of persons, created new challenges for national systems with open enrollment policies. The Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom have two particular features in common: first, they are highly internationalized and are among the strongest-performing research systems globally in terms of the quality and impact of their scientific output; second, they have the highest percentages of international students among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries at the doctoral level (>40 percent).[24] These students are mostly in the STEM fields. In the Netherlands, for instance, the percentage of international

doctoral students in STEM may be as high as 75 percent. Fifty percent of all scientific staff in technological universities are international, 40 percent on average across all fields in the research university sector.[25] In the United Kingdom, 40 percent of staff at the top universities were from the European Union prior to Brexit.

Clearly such "open systems" greatly benefit from open borders. Participation in EU programs adds to their academic quality and performance. These four nations, for instance, have achieved the highest return on investment from funding by the European Research Council by attracting many ERC grantees from other countries.[26] Yet, if they go without the European Union's free mobility rules, universities may face serious uncertainties regarding their ability to engage with the international community. More generally, closing borders would be detrimental to their corporate and cultural sectors, as much as to their universities.

At the same time, such protectionist trends are not shaped only by nationalist parties or by national governments. In some cases, the university sector itself may actually seek policies to influence the outflow and particularly the inflow of academic and student talent. In the Netherlands, for instance, universities may on the one hand plead for continued tax exemptions (30 percent reduction for ex-pats for the first years after arrival) for international staff, while on the other hand asking the government for more legally sound options to control and direct the inflow of international students.

The need for more effective steering of student flows is understandable, given the conditions in which universities and governments operate in Europe. The European Union provides them with major opportunities for internationalization (i.e., open borders) but may at the same time constrain their options to regulate consequences at the level of the system or the institution. This is because the right of free movement of persons in the European Union[27] implies that students from other EU member states basically have access to higher education on the same conditions as member states' domestic students have. Initially, this right provided a legal basis for student mobility and the start of the successful Erasmus program in 1987, which is based on short-term re-

ciprocal student exchange. In the first decade of its operation, it was further facilitated by the introduction of mobility instruments enabling the transfer of credits and the recognition of degrees.

With the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1998, a major step was taken to harmonize the degree systems of the member states, and since then through the so-called Bologna Process applied to a much larger range of 48 countries, together shaping the European Higher Education Area.[28] A decade of system reform introducing a bachelor's-master's degree structure,[29] led to greater degree mobility, or "free mobility" (i.e., without regulation through Erasmus learning contracts or grant support). But unlike Erasmus, there emerged no mechanisms for reciprocity and to balance the migration of students and faculty between countries. As a result, these migration flows are uneven.

## The Example of the Netherlands and Denmark

Dutch research universities saw their percentage of international students more than quadruple after the introduction of the Bologna reforms (from 5 percent of all enrollment in 2000 to more than 20 percent in 2019).[30] With their generally high position on global rankings (virtually all are in the top 200)[31] and broad provision of programs taught in English (23 percent at bachelor's level and 74 percent at master's level),[32] it is expected that these numbers will continue to rise, even though Dutch universities charge higher tuition (around €2,000–€4,000 per year for EU-EEA students) than most other European countries, where enrolment is sometimes free.[33]

External events, such as Brexit, may further contribute to this growth of students in the Dutch system. The Netherlands is seen as one of the best and more affordable alternatives for English-taught higher education in Europe. Projections by the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science in 2018 anticipate a 25 percent increase in international students over five years. This would bring the enrollment of students from the EU-EEA up to some 50,000 in 2023—in other words, the equivalent of two midsize universities in a system of just 14 public research universities that currently command some 15 percent of the nation's

public budget. In 2019, the number enrolled was already 43,706.[34] As the state contribution to universities is an institutional lump sum within a fixed macro-budget, the above forecast growth resulted in a significant decrease in per capita funding over the past years, and therefore the Dutch research universities feared that this trend would continue, diminishing the quality of teaching and learning.

This is one of the main reasons universities asked the government to enlarge the range of legal instruments available to them to better control the admission of international students. Additional arguments are related to the balance of nationalities within international groups, which may become too strongly biased toward, for instance, German students in certain social science fields, or Asian students, especially at technological universities and in STEM fields.

Universities in the Netherlands generally do not have the ability to set quantitative caps for access to study programs. All students who fulfill the formal entry requirements, be they Dutch or other EU-EEA nationalities, are thus admitted. Only in some specific (professional, performing, or liberal arts) fields are universities allowed to use a "numerus fixus," or cap, and select their applicants before admission. The number of graduate programs, especially those taught in English, use some form of selective admission, often using a combination of merit-based criteria (prior academic achievement) and background variables related to students' home country or region. However, Dutch students rallied against the evolving criteria for graduate enrollment, as these criteria would also apply to them, whereas they hitherto were admitted into master's programs simply on the basis of their bachelor's degree, without extra criteria for GPA or level of English. The national student union argued against that "as a Dutchman, it is difficult to compete with a multitude of foreign students, whose majority have better grades, *but who have developed less in other areas*."[35] But admissions rules must be the same for all students under Dutch and EU legislation.

Denmark is facing comparable challenges. Unlike in the Netherlands, tuition is free for EU-EER students, and loans and scholarships are available. Over the past years, students from the rest of the European Union collected the same generous support packages and fee waivers

as Danish undergraduates. But Danish ministers questioned the value of this spending. Danish officials asked the European Commission to help solve the problem of students who were unwilling to pay back study loans after leaving the country. But they found no support in Brussels. The Danish government then tried to restrict the inflow of EU students based national labor market needs, as allowed under EU rules. But this policy solution became too complex—once students graduate, some may choose to leave the country. Consequently, the government reduced the number of programs taught in English at Danish universities. University rectors criticized this policy choice, claiming that efforts to reduce numbers of international students by closing English-taught degree programs would limit the education of Danish students (i.e., programs may not be sustainable in Danish because of lack of interest among only domestic students) and widen skills gaps.[36]

The experience of the Netherlands and Denmark demonstrates the budget and political complexity of internationally attractive open higher education systems. It also shows how vulnerable universities are in the face of nationalist or populist parties that freely criticize their international aspirations as part of their anti-globalization and anti-elite discourse. A glaring example is the Dutch Forum for Democracy (FvD), a right-wing, national-conservative, euro-skeptic political party established in 2015. During its election campaign in 2019, the FvD launched a "left-wing indoctrination hotline" for students who suspect left-wing political bias on their campus.[37] They won the Dutch provincial elections. The FvD leader, who holds a PhD from Leiden University, attacked universities in his victory speech as "one of the institutions that undermine our society."[38] The FvD is popular among right-wing student groups.

It was difficult to explain to Dutch taxpayers why more than 22,000 German degree students need to be educated "on their purse" when only some 1,200 Dutch students study in Germany,[39] a country with a much larger economy, with only slightly lower GDP (6 percent less than the Dutch GDP per capita in 2019), and with virtually free higher education. The Dutch government actually prompted its universities to recruit German students in the 1990s, as part of its "cross-border higher

education policy." Universities in border regions, for example, Maastricht and Twente Universities, were especially successful, introducing many English-taught programs; Maastricht began to change its entire operational language into English. However, Dutch students were less motivated to study in Germany, and efforts to balance these flows failed. A former ministerial official commented with hindsight in 2011, "Recruiting German students is absurd and socially irresponsible. Only some universities benefit, while the government has to pick up the bill and less budget is left for domestic students."[40]

Student mobility between the Netherlands and Belgium (3,600 to and 3,272 from Belgium) or with the United Kingdom (3,360 to and 3,100 from the UK) is better balanced, despite the unequal population size and bigger differences in GDP and tuition fees in the case of the United Kingdom. Countries smaller in population and with large neighbors, like Austria, may face similar challenges.

As much support as there is for subsidized short-term student exchange under the Erasmus program, it is clear that the free mobility of degree students within Europe is more difficult to sustain. A money-follows-student system at the European Union level could be a solution, but it does not seem feasible in the short term given the important differences between member states in terms of tuition fee levels and student financial support systems.

Universities in countries with open systems may greatly benefit from the inflow of international students. In the Dutch case, the continued existence of its research universities in border regions may even depend on these flows. International talent is also crucial for national research and development productivity, and Dutch universities receive strong support from the corporate sector for their 2018 internationalization agenda.

However, such countries also saw the support for nationalist and populist parties rise over the past decade. Ministers are then caught between issues of national interest, such as R&D performance and labor market demands for highly skilled immigrants required for economic growth on the one hand, and nationalist pressures from up-and-coming political parties on the other. In the view of neo-nationalist parties,

solutions to national problems include closing borders rather than keeping them open: internationalization of higher education is a problem rather than an opportunity. But as noted previously, these pressures do not come only from external political parties or populist groups.

Universities may actually contribute to these trends. For instance, in 2018 the University of Amsterdam transitioned to English in courses taught in popular study programs such as business studies and psychology. This caused an overwhelming number of international applications and enrollments, which the university lacked the infrastructure to adequately handle. Amsterdam's municipal government was not able to provide proper housing for these students. This triggered criticism by student organizations and populist voices on the city council. Both groups argued for "domestic students first." In other student cities, including Groningen and Utrecht, student organizations spoke out against "international students as a business model" and occupied university squares to protest the lack of student housing. Conservative student fraternities tend to select their housemates from within their own circles, and "no foreigners" was frequently found to be a top criterion.[41]

These examples serve to further illustrate that, as stated before, universities cannot assume that nationalistic anti-internationalization or anti-globalization trends are exclusively manifest outside their walls. In balancing access, cost, and quality of a higher education system, governments face a trilemma, as they can generally only achieve two out of three politically desirable goals: low public and private tuition fee costs; mass access to higher education; and stable or improved quality in teaching, research, and public engagement activities.[42] The extent to which universities can effectively navigate this complex space depends on their degree of institutional autonomy and government financial support.

## Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom under Siege in Europe?

The arrival of illiberal democracies in Hungary and Poland, and neo-nationalist movements more generally, raises new questions regarding

the health of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Europe. Although with limited powers related to national higher education policies, the European integration process has had a major impact on universities. European universities anticipated these changes in the late 1980s when they formulated their main principles and values under the concept of a common European inheritance. These were laid down in a charter in 1988, at the 900th anniversary of Europe's oldest university, the University of Bologna (founded 1088). This charter, called the Magna Charta Universitatum[43] includes institutional autonomy and academic freedom among its fundamental principles:

> The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies . . . to meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching most be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power. (fundamental principle 1)

> Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement. Rejecting intolerance and always open to dialogue, a university is an ideal meeting ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it by research and innovation and for students entitled, able and willing to enrich their minds with knowledge. (fundamental principle 3)

The charter was originally signed by some 500 European rectors and later by many more university from around the world. To date, a total of 889 universities from 88 countries on all continents have signed, with more than a dozen others waiting to join at the next signing ceremony. In 1998, at its 10th anniversary, European university leaders decided to launch the Observatory Magna Charta on the universities' fundamental values and rights to more closely monitor the implementation of the principles outlined in the charter. On that occasion they noted:

> Indeed, Europe had changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the new political situation of an open territory (in which national borders were less and less important) called for constant analysis of the changes

affecting academia, from within or from without, as the relevance of old references was being questioned by the sheer speed and extent of social transformations in the region—from Lisbon to Vladivostok.[44]

The Observatory continuously monitors the key values and fundamental principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. As result, formal statements of concern for Turkish scholars and universities were published in 2016 and for preserving institutional autonomy among universities in Hungary, with specific reference to the CEU, in 2017.[45] At the Magna Charta's 30th anniversary in 2018, the president of the Observatory remarked, "In times of political turbulence, competing claims and internal fragmentation, values matter more than ever for universities as they are they are foundational principles of institutional self-understanding and positioning in society."[46]

The European University Association (EUA), which represents more than 800 universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries, is also concerned with monitoring and promoting institutional autonomy as a core principle of university governance and advocating academic freedom as the single most important basis for meaningful academic research and teaching.[47] It does so in close cooperation with other organizations such as the Magna Charta Observatory, the International Association of Universities (IAU), and Scholars at Risk. The EUA also monitors institutional autonomy through its Autonomy Scorecard.[48] Until 2017, the Scorecard analyses showed that the level of autonomy that universities in Europe have varied greatly, but it showed improvements.[49] However, in 2017 the EUA became concerned and noted:

> While earlier assessments showed promising developments towards more autonomy in Europe, there is currently no distinguishable uniform trend. . . . The Old Continent faces . . . rising populism, weakening solidarity and pressure on some of its most important values—all of which affect the ability of the higher education and research sectors in fulfilling their missions. In this scenario, university autonomy and academic freedom are of particular concern, as there is a growing tendency for governments to interfere. We have recently seen concrete

cases in countries in Europe. . . . This is worrisome as autonomy and academic freedom are crucial to the well-functioning of universities.[50]

The problems in Hungary represent extreme cases; they do not represent a general trend in all European countries. Nevertheless, the European university sector has found common ground to stand with colleagues under siege. A hashtag campaign, #IstandwithCEU, prompted many onto the streets of Budapest in 2017 and at the end of 2018 to protest the Hungarian government's attacks on the CEU. And the rectors' associations of 10 countries signed the Vienna Declaration[51] warning of neo-nationalist efforts to restrict academic freedom and threats to democracy. But what can be done beyond public statements, debate, and advocacy?

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union established in 2000 provides in Article 13 that "the arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint" and that "academic freedom shall be respected."[52] Institutional autonomy is generally promoted by the European Commission throughout its series of policy papers and agendas on the modernization of higher education in Europe. However, the European Union does not have sufficient legal competencies to directly interfere with what are national systems of higher education. Member nations are reluctant to directly intervene.

However, the events in Hungary, where the CEU was eventually forced to move from Budapest to Vienna, triggered the European Union to interfere in a broader and more drastic sense. It did so through Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union with the European Parliament, adopting a Recommendation on Defense of Academic Freedom. Referencing Article 13 of the Charter on Fundamental Rights of the European Union, its Human Rights Guidelines, and UNESCO's definition of academic freedom, it stated, "The right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies."[53]

The European Parliament then recommended that the council, the commission, and other EU institutions express the importance of academic freedom in all aspects of the European Union's external policies and activities. The objective: to demonstrate active support for students and academics who are at risk. It also proposed that a similar commitment to academic freedom be part of the Copenhagen criteria for future accession to the European Union, and it specifically mentioned the attack on academic freedom in Hungary and supported initiatives to enhance academic freedom in existing programs like Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+.[54] However, despite a last-minute effort by the leader of the European Parliament's conservatives to broker a deal between the CEU and the Technical University Munich[55] to allow the CEU to stay in Budapest, the decision was made to move to Vienna. The CEU's president bitterly condemned Western powers for not having done enough.[56] "Academic freedom or even the university cannot be taken for granted," he warned.[57]

## Universities as Followers or Leaders?

Many universities in Europe focused their attention on being globally competitive while at the same time often neglecting the consequences of globalization, including growing inequality and diversity in their local communities. One cause is the drive to become world-class universities, in particular the pursuit of positioning on global rankings, often at the cost of their "national mission and relevancy in the societies that give them life and purpose."[58]

The rise of neo-nationalist movements is a wake-up call. "What seems to have died is the European international education community's faith in the inevitability of the cosmopolitan project," noted one observer, "in which national boundaries and ethnic loyalties would dissolve over time to allow greater openness, diversity and a sense of global citizenship."[59] The signs of trouble came in the first few years of the twenty-first century, when students took to the streets in the south of Europe to protest European higher education policies, particularly the Bologna Process and the Lisbon aims to make "Europe the world's

most competitive knowledge economy." This European response to globalization was perceived by some as a neoliberal, Anglo-Saxon effort that conflicted with European social values.[60] EU ambitions were seriously set back by the vote against the new EU Treaty in 2005 and then the 2008 global financial crisis.[61] Students protested in 2006 when ministers discussed future scenarios of higher education at an OECD meeting in Athens,[62] with the concern that globalization was creating economic imbalances with detrimental effects on social cohesion.[63]

I argued in 2007 that European universities need to broaden their missions to not only respond to the profitable side of globalization, but also to address problems such as migration and social exclusion, to be more open and inclusive, to balance economic and social responsiveness, and to redefine their "social contract" in a globalized context. In the local context, this means enhancing access for migrant and minority students; supporting the integration of student groups with different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; and thus embracing diversity in all its dimensions and make internationalization inclusive.[64]

UNESCO stated in 2015 that "the social contract that binds higher education institutions to society at large needs to be redefined in a context of increased global competition." The European Commission, alerted by the protests to the crisis around the euro mostly in the south, notably in Greece, revised its hitherto rather utilitarian education agenda by stating, "With regard to the recent tragic events related to radicalization in parts of Europe, a particular focus on civic democratic, intercultural competencies and critical thinking is even more urgent."[65]

Are universities sufficiently aware of the looming tensions that led to the rise of right-wing populism? The vice chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge both assured me during a conference dinner only 10 days prior to the Brexit referendum that they were not worried about it passing because "we wrote a letter to the Prime Minister!" Some 90 percent of people working in UK higher education voted Remain, but the majority of voters did otherwise.[66] Leading universities may be especially criticized for neglecting local needs, while pushing so hard for their global missions. But even at the system level it should have been obvi-

ous that higher education has largely ignored the growing inequalities resulting from globalization.[67]

European universities cannot assume that nationalistic anti-internationalization or anti-globalization trends are exclusively manifested outside their walls. Skepticism of internationalization also exists inside academia. There is concern over the use of English as a second or foreign language for teaching and learning, the increased focus on global rankings and the reputation race with its annual tables of losers and winners, and worries over the recruitment of international students for institutional income and more generally "academic capitalism." These internal voices do not represent the dominant academic perspective or the formal institutional view. But they raise the question of whether academia's internal debate has conservative traits that include academic nationalism, protectionism, or indeed isolationism.

Most universities have been followers rather than leaders (see chapter 2). The rise of populism is not only a wake-up call. It is also an opportunity to speak up more loudly for open societies and to recover their sense of social purpose. Various constructive responses are emerging in this respect. Notable is the increased attention to the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For instance, the bottom-up initiatives launched by the EUA emphasize that increased migration has contributed to a more culturally diverse Europe.[68] This included a project for refugees with a refugee welcome map showing an overview of initiatives of higher education institutions and related networks and organizations supporting refugee students, researchers, and academic staff.[69] A major and early example is Germany's program for refugee students,[70] aligned with Chancellor Merkel's welcoming policy for refugees, for which German higher education was praised in a recent Eurydice report.[71] Another example is Ireland's universities of sanctuary.[72] There is also the program sponsored by Erasmus+ and the Council of Europe's European Qualifications Passport for Refugees to recognize refugees' qualifications.[73]

In the United Kingdom, where the top universities, specifically Oxbridge, were accused of "social apartheid,"[74] in 2018 the government boosted the universities' civic role with a £500 million fund and the

launch of "civic university agreements,"[75] aiming to promote regional collaborations and more local student engagement.

For the first time in its 900-year history, the University of Oxford is offering places to students from disadvantaged backgrounds with lower grades.[76] The ultimate response to inequality and anti-elite discourse came from French president Macron, who proposed to abolish his alma mater, the elite École nationale d'administration.[77] Across Europe, the concept of inclusive internationalization is slowly beginning to resonate and becoming more widespread, although universities still seem to find an integration of diversity and internationalization agendas (and staff units) challenging.

Despite these recent initiatives, big questions remain. Phrases like "We have created Europe and now we have to create Europeans," which were first heard after the rejection of the EU Constitution in 2005, are being repeated, and role of universities in this is being questioned. Did we fail to develop European identity and citizenship—a goal of the Erasmus program—in our students? Should we expect to hear more from the over 3 million former Erasmus students, in defense of Europe, or have they all become the now-criticized cosmopolitan elite? Did we fail to educate them as critical thinkers about social responsibility, democratic citizenship, and civic engagement in support of an open society?

Despite all the European studies courses and mobility programs, young Europeans seem to take democracy, open borders, freedom, liberal values, and the institutions that protect them too much for granted. They understand the European Union just as an open market or trading zone, not as a peace project anymore. Yet some students are standing up as leaders of bottom-up initiatives in support of European values and open borders. Many others may be held back by ambivalence about complex and sometimes aggressive debates on identity, diversity, inclusion, and exclusion, or they may be reluctant to be seen in leadership roles as part of the "elite" themselves. It is very much in question whether the values of liberalism or liberal democracy can actually be defended on the basis of individualism, and how strategies intended to address multiculturalism, inclusion, and socioeconomic inequality can be effectively pursued by universities.

As the data from the Eurobarometer demonstrated, a large majority of Europeans are in favor of open borders and free mobility. Data from a recent survey done in France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Poland confirm that an overwhelming majority of Europeans support open society values, including freedom of expression, the rule of law, and pluralism.[78] But general support for immigration from outside the European Union has waned with the arrival of the 2015 refugee crisis. Is it naive to believe in a borderless world? Conservative historian Niall Ferguson pointed to many so-called failed states unleashing a wave of refugees. Consequently, more than 700 million adults are looking to emigrate, with Europe as their most favored destination (23 percent, compared to 21 percent for the United States).[79]

At the same time resistance to mass immigration is rising in many of the most popular immigration countries. This is certainly one of the main challenges for the European Union, which is still lacking an integrated immigration and foreign policy. Meanwhile, right-wing populist parties are targeting young voters with growing success. They are even establishing new academies. For instance, the Institut de sciences sociales, économiques et politiques in France, launched by the Rassemblement National, is aimed at training "a new elite to change the dominant beliefs in society." Donald Trump's former spin doctor Steve Bannon established an alt-right university to train nationalists, although it was shut down by the Italian government.[80] The Hungarian government continues to restrict the academic independence of the Academy of Sciences. To battle these neo-nationalist predilections, a network of such academies of Europe, the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), joined forces to address the increasingly hostile political climate toward science in a growing portion of Western societies.[81]

We owe it to young Europeans to be optimistic. This is "a moral duty," as we learned from Karl Popper, the great defender of an open society. In this spirit Leiden University's rector wrote, "If history has taught us anything, it is that out of conflict comes collaboration. Brexit won't hold back science because the challenges the world faces are bigger than the fights between nations and it is in everyone's best interest to work together."[82]

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that global scientific cooperation is essential; it has resulted in an unprecedented push for global collaboration and open science. At this time it is too early to fully assess the implications of the pandemic on higher education in Europe. Will it lead to a further de-globalization or re-globalization and does this imply a rebalancing of the global higher education landscape? Will it bring the European Union closer together or drive toward it toward further fragmentation, re-regionalization, or even re-nationalization?

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are stated as values in the European Treaty and the European Charter on Human Rights, but they are under pressure in some parts of Europe. The European Union is after all a collection of sovereign member states, lacking a consolidated foreign affairs policy and with only limited competencies to act internally in research policy, and even less so in education. Only with stronger internal cohesion will the European Union be able to play a significant role. Let's hope that this pandemic, despite its many victims, will eventually contribute to that.