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**Higher education in the Western Balkans:  
Reforms, developments, trends**



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developments, trends. Key findings from field research.**

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## CONTENTS

- 5 Preface
- 10 Map of the Western Balkans
- 11 Abbreviations
  
- Chapter 1*
- 13 Two decades of higher education reforms in the Western Balkans
  
- Chapter 2*
- 19 Some regional distinctions underlying higher education
  
- Chapter 3*
- 25 The Bologna agenda and its troubled implementation
  
- Chapter 4*
- 33 Differentiation and institutional diversity
  
- Chapter 5*
- 39 Higher education governance and fragmentation of universities
  
- Chapter 6*
- 47 Private higher education institutions
  
- Chapter 7*
- 55 Higher education institutions and their roles
  
- Chapter 8*
- 61 Internationalisation and international cooperation
  
- Chapter 9*
- 67 Equity and egalitarian values – an issue in the shadow
  
- Chapter 10*
- 73 Student role in university governance and national higher education policy making
  
- Annex*
- 81 On gathering statistical data in the region
  
- 93 Bibliography
- 97 Index



## PREFACE

In this booklet we aim to present the main findings of a study of current trends and issues in higher education which was conducted in seventeen higher education institutions from eight countries of the Western Balkans. The study was included in a broader research project entitled *Differentiation, equity, productivity: The social and economic consequences of expanded and differentiated higher education systems – internationalisation aspects* (DEP) supported by a grant from the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS). The field research was conducted during the first half of 2012.

At the beginning, it is necessary to briefly sketch out the broader context of the DEP project. The story began with a research project proposal under the EUROCORES scheme of the European Science Foundation (ESF) a few years ago. Within this scheme, a proposed theme on *Higher Education and Social Change* (EuroHESC) was selected in 2007 for further development. One of the research project proposals developed by a consortium of research centres and institutes from seven universities<sup>1</sup> was entitled *Differentiation, equity, productivity: The social and economic consequences of expanded and differentiated higher education systems* (DEP). The project proposal was positively evaluated (2009), but unfortunately for various – formal and financial – reasons it was impossible to establish a consortium with a sufficient number of consortium members (i.e., 70 percent of the total) and funded by all the respective national research agencies.

It was during this period that ARRS joined the ESF and it made a decision to fund all research groups from domestic institutions that had been involved in projects evaluated positively by ESF peer reviewers, regardless of the possibility of establishing an international project consortium to undertake comparative European research, which turned out to be the situation facing the DEP project. Of course, in this case it was necessary to modify the original project for it to be viable in the new conditions,

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1 These institutions are: The Open University, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI), London, UK; Dublin Institute of Technology, Graduate Research School, Dublin, Ireland; University of Twente, Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), Enschede, the Netherlands; Poznan University, Centre for Public Policy, Poznan, Poland; Kassel University, International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER), Kassel, Germany; Karlstad University and Göteborg University, Centre for Public Sector Research, Sweden; University of Ljubljana, Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS), Ljubljana, Slovenia.

but it was also necessary to maintain cooperation with the international partners. In the original DEP project proposal, the Slovenian partner (CEPS) was in charge of the transversal issues and thus in the process of modifying the project the accent was placed on the *internationalisation processes in higher education* while some elements of the original proposal – too ambitious in the new conditions – were omitted.

From the start of 2010 to the end of 2012 a six-member research team at the University of Ljubljana implemented the modified DEP project, while also working closely not only with five partner institutions of the original project, but also with researchers from other institutions, mostly but not exclusively in Central and South-east Europe. In addition, the modified project was linked in one of its dimensions to another joint project entitled *Enhancing access through a focus on equity* (EQUNET) financed through the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, a network was created and the fruitful cooperation of researchers from several institutions began. On one hand, the Ljubljana CEPS team was working on its own research agenda (much broader than what is covered in this booklet); on the other, it was also organising colloquia and seminars with invited partners and other participants: so-called *idyllic meetings* in spring and *symposion* events in autumn. The first type of event was designed as a colloquium within a relatively small circle (20 – 25 people) allowing for a detailed discussion of particular themes while the second was conceived as a small-scale conference. The series of *symposion* events started by discussing a broad theme of the future of European higher education, followed by a discussion on more detailed themes, such as e.g. equity in European higher education (co-organised by the EQUNET project team), the differentiation of higher education in an internationalised and globalised context, internationalisation and/or globalisation processes and their general impact on national higher education systems (with a particular focus on convergence and divergence as well as on centres and peripheries) and, finally, with an anniversary conference on “the past, present and future of higher education research: between scholarship and policy making” which marked the 25 years of existence of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) following its annual conference in 2012.

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2 The consortium was led by the Menon network (Brussels) and made up of eight associations and four umbrella organisations bringing stakeholder groups together from across Europe, including four research institutes and centres from Bologna, Hanover, Vienna and Ljubljana.

A special feature of this network was its geographic and, in particular, generational diversity: senior researchers alongside early-stage researchers and PhD students. Several of them had experience from working for national student unions as well as for the European Students' Union (ESU), thus being involved in European higher education reforms of the last decade in quite a direct way. Some participants were also professionals working for relevant European and/or national institutions and associations – or simply people with long and valuable experience in higher education. From the geographic point of view, almost all European regions were represented. In particular, participation from the Western Balkans was emphasised.

The recent reforms and developments in European higher education are a well-researched issue and have also been largely discussed in public. In this context, however, the European map has some 'white spots' – the Western Balkans, for example, where higher education dynamics has remained under-researched. The notion of the Western Balkans is fairly new. It was born in Western Europe: it began to be used in the new Euro-language as a seemingly neutral term for a region that remained outside the first (2004) and second (2007) waves of EU enlargement. It is a modern geopolitical term; its formal and popular definition is usually grasped in the formula 'ex-YU countries – Slovenia + Albania'.

Before 1990, the region consisted of two countries – and therefore just two national higher education systems: the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY; with six republics and two autonomous regions) and the Socialist People's Republic of Albania. None of them was part of the Eastern Bloc (with each representing another kind of 'revisionism' from the Soviet point of view), but the border between them was hermetically closed and there was practically no bilateral cooperation in higher education and research. On the contrary, Yugoslavia's borders to Western Europe were broadly open. After 1990, this hermetic border between two countries in the region disappeared and Albania has since opened its borders widely but, following a decade of regional wars, conflicts and unrest, new borders – including a 'Schengen' one – have been developed between the seven new countries which have emerged in the territory of former Yugoslavia.

Albania does not share a common heritage in higher education development before 1990 (and after the end of World War II) with the seven other countries, while Slovenia (an EU member country since 2004), which does share this common heritage, has been 'excluded' from the political concept of the Western Balkans. Yet it is important to stress that the former socialist Yugoslavia was open to the West, its education

system was decentralised (due to the different languages, educational and cultural traditions etc.) and there were common as well as quite diverse elements among the six previous republics (that made up the federation). During the two decades of the so-called transition period, the new nation-states have developed their systems in different ways and the previous common elements have become less evident. On the other hand, Albania has moved far away from its autarchic past and firmly positioned itself within the (new) regional framework.

Against this background, it is probably already clear why the CEPS team decided to specifically investigate this region: its recent *integration into European (and global) trends* on one hand and *its peculiarities and specific dynamics* on the other – as well as the fact that higher education in the region has been under-researched – was our biggest challenge.

Based on the core part of the DEP project, we prepared a plan for the field study in 2011 which was conducted between February and June 2012. All eight countries of the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia) were included; in each of them we focused on two universities: in principle, on the oldest one and one of the newer ones (see the detailed list of them on the next page). Two countries deviate from this rule: in Bosnia and Herzegovina we chose two institutions in the two constituent parts of the country and Kosovo has been fully included in the study only with the oldest university. In addition, we included two small, recently established private institutions (one from Kosovo and one from Slovenia which is, in fact, the third institution from this country) in the sample.

At these universities and in these countries we conducted 78 interviews with academic leaders (Rectors, Vice-Rectors, Deans and Vice-Deans) as well as with representatives of the ministries responsible for higher education, representatives of the agencies for quality assurance and with independent experts. The interviewees are kept anonymous according to the agreed rules; we sometimes only add a general remark about an interviewee's status. We also designed a special questionnaire that was responded to by 2,019 academics – senior and junior professors, lecturers and assistants – from these universities. Not all of the respondents answered *all* of the questions (28 of them), so their number in the figures in our tables varies; the lowest number of respondents to an individual question is 1,678. Our goal was to have about 5% of the employees at the major universities (over 1,000 employees) and about 10% from the smaller ones in the sample. At the two small private institutions from Kosovo

and Slovenia the number of respondents remained negligible and, therefore, they were omitted from further analyses. However, we did use two interviews from these two institutions.

On the other hand, in addition to the relatively few research papers on higher education in the region the research team obtained and analysed a rich collection of reports, policy documents and legislation (this material is extremely broad and has therefore not been added to the bibliographic supplement) as well as statistical data from all eight countries. Gathering the statistical data was a particular challenge; therefore, a little more space is devoted to this issue in the final chapter.

So much about the background to the writing of this booklet. Let us finally note that this publication does not primarily address a specialised audience of social science researchers, including higher education researchers; this audience will probably be more interested in some of the papers emerging from the project and which are listed in the bibliography. We have tried to keep the booklet short and transparent. Our main purpose has been to provide an insight into some of our main findings to a *broader interested public*, especially academics, students, policy makers and higher education partners and/or stakeholders – in the region as well as in wider Europe and the world. We are reluctant to design policy recommendations in our text; our opinion is that there have already been too many such recommendations in the last decade and that they have been insufficiently thought out. This should be a common task of all higher education partners; therefore, we understood that our task lies in giving the most correct and concise report of our findings.

This booklet has ten chapters. We begin with an analysis of higher education reforms after 1990 and outline some of the key issues that have been raised. To facilitate an understanding of the peculiarities of these developments, we continue in *Chapter 2* with a presentation of some distinctions underlying higher education in the region. We then deal with the impact of the Bologna Process in the region, in particular its diverse and difficult implementation (*Chapter 3*). Further on, we continue by focusing on some more detailed questions: first on institutional diversification (*Chapter 4*) and then on institutional governance and, in particular, on the regional peculiarity – the fragmentation of universities (*Chapter 5*). We pay special attention to private higher education in *Chapter 6*, followed by *Chapter 7* on higher education institutions and their roles as perceived at the universities visited by the research team. *Chapter 8* deals with internationalisation and international cooperation. Finally, we

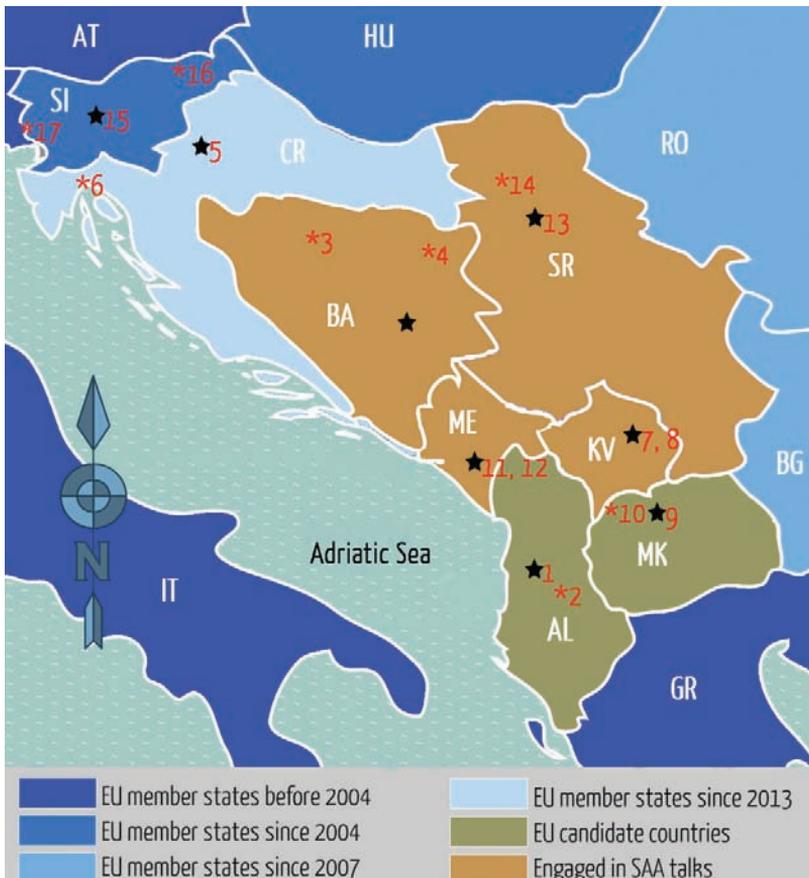
address the issue of equality as a discursive and normative topic in the region (*Chapter 9*) and conclude with *Chapter 10* on the role of students in university governance and national higher education policy making.

The *annex* explains the process of gathering the statistical data. The *bibliography* contains papers published by members of the research project team in English in international monographs and journals (2010 – 2013) which provide insights into the other findings of the DEP research project. The booklet also provides a *list of figures, tables and quotations from interviews* and an *index*.

Below, readers can find a map of the region as well as an explanation of the abbreviations used in the booklet.

### The Western Balkans

The countries and universities included in the study



## Abbreviations

### Countries of the region

AL	Albania
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
HR	Croatia
KV	Kosovo (under UN resolution 1244)
MK	Macedonia (the Former Yugoslav Republic of)
ME	Montenegro
SR	Serbia
SI	Slovenia

### Regional universities in the survey sample

UTI	University of Tirana, Albania (1)
UEL	University of Elbasan, Albania (2)
UBL	University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina (3)
UTU	University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina (4)
UZG	University of Zagreb, Croatia (5)
URI	University of Rijeka, Croatia (6)
UPR	University of Pristina, Kosovo (7)
AAB	AAB University, Pristina, Kosovo (8)
UKM	University of Ss Cyril and Method Skopje, Macedonia (9)
SEU	South East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia (10)
UMO	University of Montenegro, Montenegro (11)
UME	University of Mediterranean, Montenegro (12)
UBG	University of Beograd, Serbia (13)
UNS	University of Novi Sad, Serbia (14)
ULJ	University of Ljubljana, Slovenia (15)
UMB	University of Maribor, Slovenia (16)
SAS	School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica, Slovenia (17)

### Other abbreviations

ARRS	Research Agency of the Republic of Slovenia
AUK	American University of Kosovo
CARDS	EU programme to provide assistance to the countries of South-East Europe
CEEPUS	Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies
CEI	Central European Initiative University Network

CEPS	Centre for Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana
CHER	Consortium of Higher Education Researchers
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESF	European Science Foundation
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURYDICE	The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies
HE	Higher Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement (EU)
TEMPUS	Programme to support the modernisation of higher education in EU neighbours

## Chapter 1

### TWO DECADES OF HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The dynamics of higher education in the region of the Western Balkans with a population of almost 25 million unfortunately still remains on the margins of contemporary higher education studies. The regional higher education has never been the subject of systemic research; there is both a lack of data and a lack of prior studies. In addition, this area of research is determined by a controversial logic of the common and the different, the uniform and the diverse. This is not only in our case – i.e., when discussing higher education – but also when studying other segments of societies in the region. It is important to pay attention to differences in the region, but within the limits of our investigation we cannot draw a detailed picture. Here, we will mainly focus on some of the common characteristics we identified in our study.

#### Massification

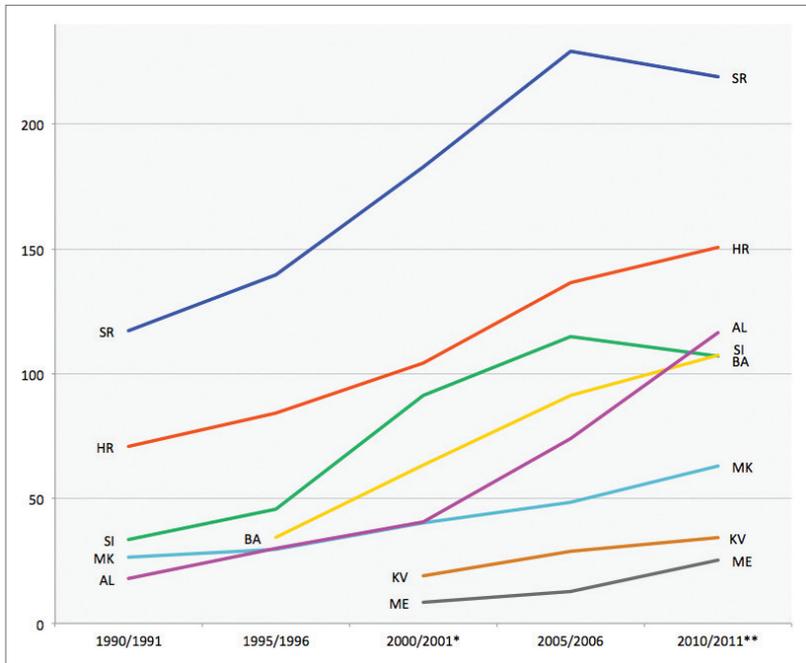
On the surface, the most visible feature of the regional higher education systems is *massification*. In former socialist Yugoslavia, there was a boom in participation rates already in the 1970s, but in the 1980s and particularly in its second half this trend slowed down considerably. In the early 1990s, these rates began to climb rapidly again: this rise depended on specific circumstances in individual – now new independent – countries. There were several reasons: from a change in cultural patterns and social ambitions via unemployment and migrations to new national policies addressing the ‘upcoming knowledge society’ etc. The situation was quite different in territories affected by wars and conflicts, in particular in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Until 2000, in most parts of the region *enrolment levels doubled or tripled* and this trend has been continuing in the last decade (see *Figure 1*).

Another easily visible feature of these developments is *the growth in the number of higher education institutions* – public and in particular private. With a few exceptions, there is no long university tradition in the region. Upon the disintegration of the federal Yugoslavia in 1991, there were 19 universities serving a country of 21 million people. Three of them were established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and two of them immediately after World War II. Almost all the others were established during the boom period of

self-management socialism in the late 1960s and 1970s to support the decentralised economic development. In Albania, the first university was founded in 1957 and it was the only university there up until 1990, although some new institutes or their branches were also established in this period.

Therefore, in 1990 there were altogether 20 public universities in the region; today, there are 47 – almost all of them crowded with students – as well as about 250 private universities and other higher education institutions with a relatively small number of students (also see *Chapter 6*). The expansion of higher education in the region has been enabled and accelerated by amendments made to legislation after 1990 but it has also been a result of the limited funds available to public universities and perhaps unreasonably high expectations with regard to private initiative in higher education. Altogether, this trend has led in recent years to an almost uncontrollable situation. Of course, within this general trend significant specific features are evident from country to country.

**Figure 1:** Students (in thousands) enrolled in higher education institutions, 1990/91 – 2010/11, by countries



Notes: ME – enrolled in 2002-2003; AL – enrolled in 2009-2010;

BA, KV and ME – earlier data is missing.

(Source: Compiled from national statistics offices)

## The first wave of reforms: The transition

We can conditionally speak about *three waves of legislating* in the region. Some elements of a common logic can also be found in approaches to the legislative regulation of higher education. At the beginning of and during the 1990s, legislators chiefly focused on the general framework which had been profoundly challenged everywhere by the overturn of the political system and by the economic conditions. For example, so-called non-budget or self-paying students were introduced at public universities along with 'budget-funded' ones and private institutions were legally allowed at this stage in some countries.

In the background of this *first wave of legislating*, the existing philosophy of higher education remained largely the same. There were a few attempts to regulate the 'spontaneity' in the field of higher education which had erupted after 1990 but, in general, these predominantly only involved technical adaptations of the traditional system – in both legal and value terms – adaptations to the new political and economic order. As large parts of the region were affected by wars and conflicts, it would be unrealistic to expect any frontal and substantial conceptual shifts and the development of new strategies and policies during this period.

Due to the complex circumstances, the first wave of legislating was delayed by about a decade in some countries, e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. In contrast, only Slovenia – which remained outside the armed conflicts after the summer of 1991 – was lucky enough to be able to address some fundamental conceptual issues already during this stage: e.g. the issue of a fragmented university system with strong faculties and a weak central university administration (see *Chapter 5*); the issue of the quality as well as the accreditation and evaluation of institutions; the issue of Europeanisation and internationalisation (it joined the European Commission's Tempus Programme already in 1991 and the Erasmus Programme in 1999) etc. Another very specific – and in fact contradictory – situation occurred in Serbia where Milošević's government imposed a legal amendment in 1998 which very strongly interfered with the traditional autonomy of universities and provoked a mass protest movement of students and teachers. This movement created an inspirational space for developing strategic ideas on higher education which were partly instrumentalised at the start of the 2000s by Zoran Đinđić's new democratic government.

## The second wave of reforms: Bologna

The *second wave of legislating* occurred at the beginning of the 2000s or – in some countries – a little later. On one hand, it was an obvious task of the ‘post-conflict’ period and ‘reintegration into Europe’; on the other hand, it was directly connected to Europeanisation processes and in particular to the Bologna Process. Slovenia joined it in 1999, Croatia in 2001 and the other five countries in 2003; only Kosovo has not joined it yet due to its political status. The legislating agenda of the second wave was stronger, at least at first sight: the common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has provided the conceptual basis for the modernisation of higher education – the basis that had been lacking before in most countries of the region. However, there is much evidence that the desire to ‘Europeanise’ the system overnight too often resulted in ‘cosmetic changes’ and not in a substantial and strategic conversion.

There is also much evidence that, at least at the beginning of this period, bottom-up incentives to modernise either curricula or governance models at the level of institutions were particularly strong. These incentives were furthered by increasing multilateral cooperation among institutions; Tempus, which all the countries of the region had gradually joined by the early 2000s, was particularly influential in this respect. In some countries, elements of the first and second waves appeared simultaneously, e.g. in Macedonia where, after the ethnic conflict of 2001, private universities were allowed under a legal amendment which also provided some incentives leading towards the system’s greater openness and internationalisation.

*There were three important changes: the first one in 1996 when a binary system was introduced; then in 2000 when the state relinquished control of universities; the state relinquished its direct control and influence after the Constitutional Court issued some rulings regarding autonomy. The third reform was in 2003 when the Bologna Process was legally introduced and implemented in 2005 (Interview 34; 16/03/2012).*

*The reform [at our university] meant, first of all, working on changing the awareness of people, the awareness of the university teachers; changing the awareness that a university teacher and assistant are not the Law, that the teacher is not someone who nobody can supervise, that he is someone who is only subject to science and that the rest should behave as he says. This mentality has been present in the heads of many teachers at our university. [...] The most difficult task was to change the teachers, to*

*make them understand that they are no longer in the centre of the process but that now the students are in the centre* (Interview 66; 27/03/2012).

### The third wave of reforms: “Political pressure”

As the Bologna Process has been progressing and as the gap between the improvised ‘cosmetic changes’ and real challenges at the national level has been widening, more amendments have been adopted in all countries since 2005. This is the *third wave of legislating*. Yet at this stage of the reforms another common problem in the policy-making process has become evident: on one hand, the successive and often contradictory amendments have been approved following governmental ‘swinging’ (i.e., conservative governments felt a need to change the previous liberal legislation, and vice versa). This practice has led to stagnation with regard to long-term national strategic targets. On the other hand, this has also led to specific regional (mis)interpretations of the Bologna Process (see *Chapter 3*). Last but not least, this has not only been negative: all of this has contributed to the revival of the debate about the role of higher education first of all in the national but also in the European context as well as its future.

The reforms were generally initiated by the responsible ministries. At least in some countries, academics felt they had been introduced into these initiatives and took part in them: “*Universities have had a fairly large impact on shaping higher education policy*”, e.g. in the process of developing the national master plan for higher education in Slovenia (interview 37; 11/04/12). In Macedonia, on the other hand, political negotiations after the slowdown of the ethnic conflicts (ended by the Ohrid Agreement of 2001 which also includes some provisions on education for ethnic groups which were adopted in a legal amendment), provided “*a possibility to start changing the traditional law on higher education*” (interview 01; 08/02/12). This political approach was interpreted at the institutional level as the proper context for speeding up the modernisation of higher education.

However, some interviewees give an impression that even in those countries where this cooperation existed in previous times it has been eroded by today. Of course, the gradual disillusionment in the ‘new era’ has probably been contributing to the gloomier picture nowadays. The just quoted interviewee added: “*I do not know if this is still true. Now, the university is under the main pressure from politics*” (interview 37; 11/04/12). The *politicisation of higher education* is particularly connected to issues

concerning private institutions; almost everywhere they were legally allowed already during the first wave of legislating but this sector only really started to grow after 2000.

*The latest legislative proposals from two years ago were aimed at the privatisation of higher education and the goal was to destroy [our] University [...]. This was the aim of politics for reasons of personal gain. The idea is that the university would be cut into several smaller ones and the declared reason was said to be international comparison – that ‘this is being done elsewhere in Europe’ (Interview 29; 09/03/2012).*

### Conclusion

The privatisation of higher education is obviously a Pandora’s box in the Western Balkans. There has been a growing belief throughout the region that ‘only competition can assure quality.’ A consensus has been built around the thesis that traditional universities are working inefficiently and they need competition and such competition may come only from ‘new’ institutions. It would be quite difficult to defend the ‘old’ institutions against this criticism; after a decade of political, economic and societal crisis they have been widely criticised for their ‘unresponsiveness’ and ‘ossification’, but they are also often academically depleted. However, until now there has been no proof that private institutions offer a real alternative. Interviewees at the ‘old’ universities liked to stress that the new institutions are by no means competitors to them; they see their competitors as existing abroad. Yet internationalisation represents a specifically tough issue on the reform agendas (see *Chapter 8*).

## Chapter 2

### SOME REGIONAL DISTINCTIONS UNDERLYING HIGHER EDUCATION

Recent conflicts, the consequent reconstruction of societies and delayed economic and institutional transition considerably affected higher education in most countries of the Western Balkans. The interviewees (people in leading positions) showed a clear identification with the European cultural space when imagining the post-conflict recovery and the future of their country or institution. There is an obvious tendency to take over ideas from abroad, copy policy solutions and refer to perceived successful cases of other countries. Yet there are ideas, narratives, discourses, perceptions, conceptualisations and attitudes that indicate a significant level of idiosyncrasy in the examined region.

This chapter briefly presents some of the *regional distinctions underlying higher education systems, policies and reforms* as emerging from the interviews, discussions and writings. The emphasis is on a qualitative approach and the interpretation of empirically collected material (mostly interviews). The chapter should be read together with the quantitative findings in *Chapter 7*. The two chapters aim to trace out the basic conceptions, local cultural specifics and normative implications from which it is possible to understand and further investigate the processes, policies and problems related to higher education in the region of the Western Balkans.

#### Peripheral identity and Europe as the guideline for reforms and transformation

In most of the interviews there is a strong and explicit (sometimes also implicit) tendency to mention Western institutions, Western systems and Western practices as the reference or role model. Across the region under scrutiny it is possible to detect a generally accepted belief in the need to follow the *Western* example in order to recover from isolation and reconstruct the post-conflict society and economy.

In this general westwards orientation the perception of *Europe* assumes an especially central role. It is seen as something external to the Western Balkans. The relationship of ‘us and Europe’ is strongly present in the talks. The peripheral identity of the region is often expressed with common references like “*these lands of ours*” (orig. *ovi naši prostori*) or “*the*

*surrounding countries*” (orig. *zemlje u okruženju*). Europe instead appears as an abstract term that stands more for a political destination than a geographical category. To a great extent, Europe and the EU are synonyms. The latter symbolises the widely accepted and internalised political goal of the Western Balkan countries (including Slovenia despite it already having achieved EU membership). The Bologna reform is often explained as being part of the necessary adjustment to the EU in the process of formal accession (especially in Croatia) and as part of the political project of approaching the economic union.

### Higher education as a hope for economic development

The governments’ policy documents offer ample references to the EU’s policy suggestions, often re-contextualised as ideas on local economic reconstruction and development. One of the strongest aspects of the economic relevance attributed to higher education is unequivocally the need to boost the *employability* of graduates. This perception notably carries along an argument that sees the necessity running in both directions: (1) graduates have to be able to find jobs; and (2) employers need graduate employees to have certain competencies and skills. Other policy actions and concepts matching those often present in the EU political communication are also promoting excellence, increasing cooperation with industry, boosting innovation and applied research etc.

Although neither in the interviews nor in the responses to the questionnaire survey we find any considerable resistance to the EU’s recommendations, it is possible to identify some alternative voices to the mainstream ideas. The reference to the university that transcends the concern for daily economic issues is well represented in this statement:

*The institution does not need philosophers and artists, but the society needs them [...] we need to get rid of the invasion of job seekers [i.e., people who go to University to find better employment] (Interview 49; 16/03/2012).*

This interviewee (a faculty-level senior academic from Albania) strictly separated the *labour market preparation institutions* from *universities*. Similar views were only very rarely explicitly stated by the interviewed members of academic staff. However, the results of the parallel quantitative survey (questionnaire) showed relatively high affinity for some of the broader roles of higher education in society (see *Chapter 7*). This hints at the difference in views between those academics in the leading positions

(interviewees) and the questionnaire respondents (all academic staff) when it comes to the purpose of higher education.

### Engineers' discourse and concerns

A specific attitude to higher education is present in the discourse of those interviewees from the field of engineering. This subject area is especially outlined as an example of discipline-specific discourses and ideas appearing across the range of university faculties. In the case of *engineers*, the discourse and perceptions are highly homogeneous and distinctive. They are particularly keen on *cooperation with industry*, especially in the field of *innovation*. They perceive their subject areas as encompassing a basic, productive and tangible sector which is most important for economic growth or in some cases reviving a stagnating post-war economy:

*In this need of society, which is completely normal – to increase the number of educated people – it is pushed to the extreme in the sense that often the necessity for these higher education graduates [engineering graduates] is forgotten. The necessity is not forgotten in the sense of not producing this human resource [orig. kadar] but it is forgotten in the sense that there is not enough investment in human resources which are primarily essential for society. This is the opinion from the point of view of a technical scholar [engineer]. We [higher education of today] create consumers, but what will we consume if we do not produce... (Interview 68; 27/03/2012).*

This reasoning is often grounded in the conviction that society needs more engineering graduates in comparison to the overwhelming graduation rates from the social sciences, such as law, business and economics. The emphasis on engineering can partly also be attributed to the role of engineering faculties in the industrialisation and modernisation process during the socialist period in both Albania and former Yugoslavia.

Not least, the engineering academics are notably sceptical of the reforms. There is strong resistance and reaction to the Bologna cycles by advocating the return to long cycles or opting for 4+1 (see *Chapter 3*). This is underpinned by the claim that *it is impossible to produce a good engineer in 3 years*.

### State-, nation- and economy-building: The grand projects

One of the region's outstanding specific features is the understanding of the role of higher education in the reconstruction of a *post-conflict* and

*transitional* society and economy. There is a common understanding of the constitutive role of higher education in *state-building* or *nation-building*. Such beliefs and perceptions are not surprising in a region which recently experienced an escalation of tensions in society culminating in several armed inter-ethnic conflicts.

There is still some variation across the countries on this matter. For example, in Kosovo one can often find both the reference to national emancipation and to statehood-building, whereas in Croatia there is a stronger emphasis on the national role of the university, including in the economic competitiveness of the country. There is also variation within countries. For example, in the Republic of Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) it is possible to observe a strong view of higher education as a constitutive element of a fully functioning state, whereas in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina the university is seen more as a nation-building and economy-resuscitating institution.

In the commonly shared nation-/state-building discourse, the capital city university appears as the frontrunner and the institution which should be developed into the knowledge flagship of the nation, whereas the other universities are supposed to diversify into secondary roles (e.g. regionally or locally relevant institutions). In some cases, the leaderships of smaller universities manifested a strong ambition on the national and international scale (e.g. University of Novi Sad, University of Banja Luka).

### **An integral or decentralised university – the resistance**

The discussion on the *integration of the university* is indeed the common denominator among the interviewees from the area of former Yugoslavia. The idea of integration represents the central issue on the agendas of policy makers, academics, experts and sometimes also the general public. It pertains to the larger model of the institutional management proposed by the EU and other international institutions, whereby the functions of governance are concentrated in a relatively *autonomous managerial leadership* that is able to decide quickly, set up the strategy and sharpen the comparative advantages of the institution in order to better *compete* with the growing number of higher education institutions in the world.

This model encountered an extremely hostile normative setting rooted in a strong organisational tradition of higher education institutions – the *fragmented university*. Namely the formerly loosely bound faculties, with

their own legal entity status, have tremendous difficulties giving up their autonomy over administrative and financial issues in favour of a centrally administered and strategically run university. One of the main arguments against integration is an inefficient central administration which slows down the *agility* of the faculties (also see *Chapter 5*).

When it comes to the issue of integration of universities there are roughly two opposed blocks: First, the interviewees from the ministries, the experts and the state administrative workers tended to follow the European trends in institutional governance. Sometimes members of the university leadership took the idea over as well. The second block is represented by Faculty Deans or interlocutors from the teaching staff (particularly from the engineering fields). They view integration as the centralisation of power and therefore display greater resistance to it. The cleavage was also visible between the old teaching staff and the young ambitious scholars, especially in the accounts of the latter ones who tend to favour the idea of an integrated university.

[A ministerial representative:] *They [i.e., universities] are relatively liberal – I would not say autonomous – in this regard; they do not listen to us. On the other hand, we do not interfere and we take care not to disturb some relationships which have been traditionally established. However, we are weak in this field and, as the Ministry, we are not satisfied. The main deficiency is that the universities have realised the legal provision for the integration of the university as the centralisation of the university. Rather than integrate their functions for ease of operation, they centralise and manage the additional burden of the university. This has made terrible, slow and bureaucratic machinery* (Interview 07; 09/02/12).

[Dean of a technical faculty:] *I am working in the field of professional organisation, the organisation of production systems. [...] Integration should be a rational organisation where it is known exactly what belongs to whom, who earned what. Always at the end it comes down to money and the money should belong to those who have earned it. The University cannot be just a collection of faculties, the university must do for all the faculties everything that is rational while autonomous faculties must do what they are trained for and what they can do best* (Interview 11; 22/02/12).

## Conclusion

The chapter shows the substantial idiosyncratic characteristics of higher education systems in the Western Balkans compared to the more stable European regions. Despite a strong tendency of viewing Western Europe as a model to follow, the region maintains a somewhat idiosyncratic course and an identity external to Europe – a kind of *self-attributed orientalism*. Looking at the mere surface of the facts and evidence is not enough to allow learning about the social and political micro cosmos of the region. In-depth knowledge of local societies, history, ideas, norms, values and beliefs is crucial for both the further investigation of higher education and proper identification of the problems. Also when the recommendations of foreign actors are diffused into the region, they inevitably meet the ideas and attitudes of the local policy and academic communities. If based on erroneous assumptions or ignorance of indigenous practices, such recommendations are doomed to fail altogether or at best fail to deliver the desired outcomes.

## Chapter 3

### THE BOLOGNA AGENDA AND ITS TROUBLED IMPLEMENTATION

The international higher education space is usually estimated very highly everywhere in the Western Balkans and joining the Bologna Process (see *Chapter 1*) has often been proudly portrayed as a success at the national as well as institutional level. However, it looks as if a balance is lacking between the desire for integration into the international space and the necessary reforms which should be implemented at home. One interviewee put it directly: “*I need to stress, and I agree more with that one hypothesis, that there is a stronger desire to be involved in these international trends than we really wanted to reform our national system according to our taste*” (interview 36; 22/02/2012). This problem has led to changes which occurred “*in formal rather than substantive terms*” (interview 27; 01/03/2012). This is perhaps the crucial issue when it comes to implementing the Bologna Process in the region.

#### Bologna: An important lever which does not contribute to quality?

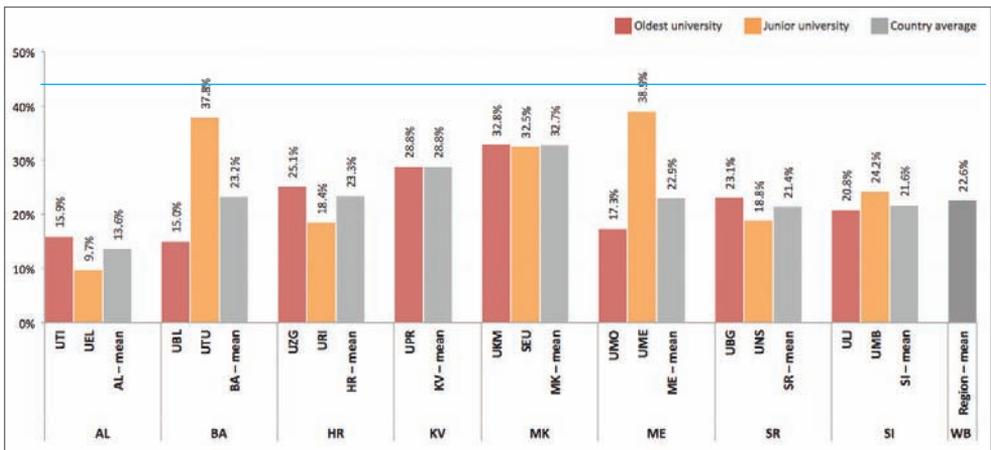
The interviewees were practically unanimous in holding that the most important lever and key impetus for national reforms has been the Bologna Process. However, this statement is far from being simply enthusiastic. One cannot overlook the great work done in recent years particularly at the institutional level, for example in modernising curricula, and to which the respondents often expressed a positive attitude; on the other hand, one can also not overlook the many critical comments.

In our questionnaire, respondents – academic staff ranging from professors to assistants – were asked *if the Bologna Process has contributed importantly to the quality of their institutions*. We searched for ‘fans’ and ‘opponents’; for this reason, the answers are evaluated on a scale from +2 (strongly agree) to –2 (strongly disagree), while neutral answers (i.e., those who responded “neither agree nor disagree” or “no opinion”) were eliminated from the calculations. The share of neutral answers varies by countries and universities: there is only 13.61 percent of such respondents in Albania while in Macedonia this share is the highest, namely 32.69 percent. In the other countries, it is between one-fifth and one-quarter of the total (see *Figure 2*).

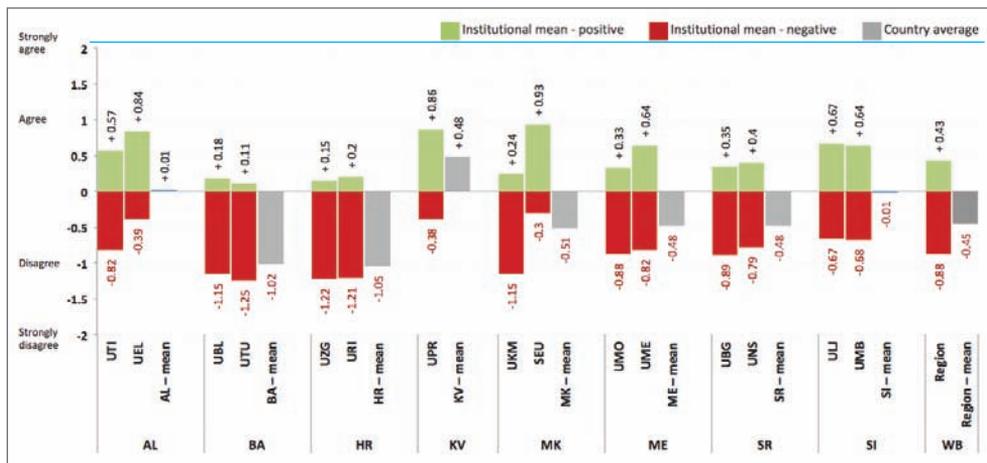
The mean score for the region is *negative*:  $-0.45$ . It is particularly negative in Croatia ( $-1.05$ ) and Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $-1.02$ ), while it is positive only in Kosovo ( $+0.48$ ). The ‘fans’ and ‘opponents’ from Albania ( $+0.01$ ) and Slovenia ( $-0.01$ ) neutralised each other. The remaining three countries (Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) are very close to the regional mean; there are more ‘opponents’ than ‘fans’. Within individual countries, there are a few visible inconsistencies between the two universities included in our sample. Thus, for example, the score for the ‘capital’ university in Albania is negative ( $-0.26$ ), whereas the score for the ‘regional’ one is positive ( $+0.45$ ). It is similar in Montenegro ( $-0.91$  vs.  $+0.63$ ) and much less explicit in Macedonia ( $-0.56$  vs.  $-0.18$ ); yet in both cases the second university is a private (non-profit) one. Generally speaking, the ‘capital’ or ‘traditional’ universities are more prone to a negative assessment than the ‘new’ and private ones. Only in the case of Slovenia is this relationship reversed, but the difference between both universities is negligible ( $0.00$  vs.  $-0.04$ ) (see *Figure 3*).

Therefore, *with a few exceptions respondents in the region do not perceive that the Bologna Process is contributing importantly to the quality of their institutions*. This matches the findings from the interviews which, of course, give a more detailed insight into the issue and related problems. Many interviewees think it is necessary to distinguish between criticisms of the Bologna Process on one side and criticisms of the domestic higher education system and its failures on the other.

**Figure 2:** The Bologna Process has contributed importantly to the quality of my institution – percentage of undecided respondents (*neither – nor; no opinion*) by countries and institutions (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)



**Figure 3:** The Bologna Process has contributed importantly to the quality of my institution – average rating by decided respondents (*from +2: strongly agree to -2: strongly disagree*) by countries and institutions (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)



### The Bologna implementation: The bottom-up and the top-down phases

Most countries in the region officially joined the Bologna Process in 2003. Yet this does not mean that until then the universities were completely cut off from the Process. On the contrary, almost everywhere there were ‘avant-garde’ institutions (or semi-organised circles within them) which started before their minister signed the Declaration. Bilateral and multilateral inter-university cooperation projects seem to have been the strongest levers in these cases. We can call this phase of accession to Bologna *the bottom-up phase*; it is mainly evidenced in project work at the university and/or faculty level. A dean of a technical faculty interpreted this stage as follows:

*Here we said that if there had been no Bologna we would have invented Bologna. We were actually headed in that direction before our minister signed the Declaration [in 2003]. The Faculty of Technical Sciences is very complex – there are 12,000 students; we are a ‘technical university’ so to say – and many of our professors were in the world. So we initiated some processes ourselves – and we welcomed Bologna. Bologna entered faculties via the university and through national institutions and even a few non-governmental organisations had some influence (Interview 11; 22/02/2012).*

Later, after the official accession, ministries launched legislative changes mostly through amendments to relevant laws (see *Chapter 1*). This was the *top-down phase* which was accelerated practically everywhere due to its ‘urgency’ – and this has gradually led to more and more criticism among the academic, student and broad publics. In many countries, substantial formal changes took place so to say overnight. While reading the documents and interviews, we cannot escape the impression that the main actors often wanted to be recognised as ‘the best student in class’ and they immediately legally regulated the national system, as ‘requested by Europe’ (also see *Chapter 2*).

Among several complaints expressed or reported in the interviews, we identified a ‘common thread’: (1) a lack of coordination of institutions at the national level and a lack of necessary resources to run reforms. There were further weak points, like e.g.: (2) a lack of information campaigns; (3) preparatory activities have usually been limited to the circle of governmental and academic decision makers while everyday academics, senior or junior, and students have remained in an information shadow. However, the interviewees are almost unanimous: the *Bologna agenda* itself has not presented a problem in their countries and their institutions; the problem is the *implementation* of the reforms.

*In 2003 there was the introduction of the Bologna system that has a lot of good points; however, it was introduced with a little force, hastily and we needed plenty of years [to heal] the childhood diseases, to correct much of this. My opinion is that a large number of people looked a little too one-sided and dogmatically at all the regulations.[...] These are all people from the previous system, who are entrenched there, so they thought that the adoption of rules, regulations and laws is changing society, changing education. And it is not so. [First] you need to create the conditions (Interview 29; 09/03/2012).*

*With us there is the situation that whatever the Bologna Process proposes the legislators or government officials quickly put into law. There is an impression that it is simply going too fast. For instance, in PhD studies there should be [by law] 180 credits [ECTS] while even in Europe it has not yet been agreed on whether these studies have credits or not. Another example: there must be 40 percent of electives [by law]. All recommendations of the Bologna Process very quickly enter the regulations. [...] An impression emerges that we are doing something that someone else has told us to (Interview 04; 23/03/2012).*

[The current reputation of the Bologna Process] *is very bad. But you know: many things are attributed to Bologna and Bologna is being dragged down, but Bologna is not at fault for this. Bologna does not impose this system of evaluation or another one. [...] Everyone who wanted to change something, to introduce a personal idea, said –‘Ah, Bologna requires it and we need to change it now because of Bologna’. [...] That was the general climate* (Interview 33; 22/02/2012).

### Implementation vs. interpretation

The interviewees sometimes refer to problems of ‘understanding’ Bologna; we could say that problems with implementation actually start with problems of interpreting what, in fact, European Ministers have agreed upon in their declarations and communiqués. This is not exclusively a Western Balkans issue; however, the region has obviously contributed its own special interpretation – or perhaps a few of them. Even in one of the interviews we found a concrete example of such an ‘original’ interpretation: “*According to Bologna, there can only be 7 exams per year and 24 hours in the classroom*” (interview 48; 13/03/2012). Of course, nothing like this has been required within the bodies of the Bologna Process. Several interviewees are obviously well aware of this problem and some also openly and critically reflect on both the (mis)interpretations as well as their criticisms, like for example the following academic (with a background in the natural sciences) who works in the position of Vice Rector:

*What actually is the idea of Bologna? Which are the elements we are not happy with? Do they result from Bologna or not? [...] A lot of consequences of the transformation in society and the diseases we have had during this transformation are seen as a consequence of Bologna leading to a critical attitude which is actually not a critical attitude to Bologna but a critical look at the consequences of the problems in [our] society. For example, there is reduced funding for higher education, an increasing number of candidates for general studies [i.e., not professional ones] because industry has collapsed etc. The easiest way is to say: ‘Oh, that’s because Bologna insists on 3+2’. My opinion is that this critical attitude is unduly sharp* (Interview 04; 23/03/2012).

### Traditional vs. new degrees

The *composition of the two new cycles, bachelor and master*, has occupied the very centre of regional disputes. *Either ‘3+2’ or ‘4+1’?* This has been the key dilemma of legislators, academics and students. This dilemma has been

reinforced by the fact that the new two-cycle structure has no tradition in the Western Balkans region and that it has therefore been incomprehensible to many. Within this context, there has been a hot debate on what the relationship should be between the ‘new’ degrees (Bachelor and Master) and the ‘old’ Diploma. The ‘avant-garde’ started by redesigning the old curricula (most often four years but in some cases like engineering also four-and-a-half or five years and medicine, up to six years) into new three-year ones. There was resistance at universities and around 2005 in some countries an interpretation gained supremacy whereby the ‘old’ Diploma should be recognised as being equal to the ‘new’ Master. The old ‘research-based’ Master’s (which was often based on individual consultation with tutors) disappeared. In some cases, this was immediately put into law; in the most direct and problematic way in Slovenia and Croatia (2006).

This was crucial for ‘understanding Bologna’ and its ‘adjustment to local circumstances.’ Thus, an ‘avant-garde’ dean interprets how the reforms were ‘swinging’ at their faculty:

*We started with a plan to reduce a four-year study programme to three years, as it was conceived, and we conceptualised the master’s programme as research-based [...] Then there was madness in the then Ministry [...] and study programmes were extended. [Now,] we have an undergraduate study programme which lasts five years. Total madness. At the same time, we wiped out the master’s programme. [...] Today, people are studying with us for five years to get the same title [i.e., a degree] which was previously awarded after four years of study. [Yet, it is called an ‘integral Bologna Masters’ now.] Someone is making fun of us (Interview 42; 27/02/2012).*

## Conclusion

Implementation of the principles of the Bologna Process in the region has a complex and contradictory nature and leaves a long series of unresolved problems. The attempt to equate ‘old’ diplomas with the ‘new’ master in the two most developed countries was an extreme case which has eliminated dilemmas by producing new problems. Some other countries have avoided such a solution and remained ‘more liberal’ regarding the ‘3+2’ or ‘4+1’ dispute but they have also had some time to learn about the consequences of this kind of ‘interpretation.’ In any case, this has probably been the centre of polemics and criticisms which still persist in the region. It seems that the region in this regard needs to consider reforming its recent reforms.

It can be concluded that the central problem of the higher education reforms and their implementation in the region is that the reception of the Bologna Process has chiefly been held in discourses dominated by a traditional value code. The *normative* dimension of the system has been changed fundamentally while the *axiological* dimension has remained largely unchanged. At this point, the 'international' and the 'global' meet the 'native', or vice versa. This conclusion requires serious further consideration of the internationalisation and Europeanisation processes or, better, the international impact on regional higher education systems. Copy-pasting ready-made solutions from the 'centre' to the 'periphery' has proved not only ineffective, but harmful too. What this and similar regions really need are models of reform and development for the 'periphery'.



## Chapter 4

### DIFFERENTIATION AND INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY

A lack of diversity among higher education institutions is coming to be seen as one of the key weaknesses of European higher education. Diversity is understood here as the existence of distinct forms of post-secondary education, of institutions and groups of institutions within a state or nation that have different and distinctive missions, educate and train for different lives and careers, have different styles of instruction, are organised and funded and operate under different laws and relationships to government. Whether and how much diversity should be introduced into national higher education systems continues to be a controversial issue. The advocates, such as the European Union, OECD, and the World Bank, suggest that differentiation is necessary to achieve two important goals: more equity in terms of access to a wider variety of students, and more excellence through institutional specialisation. The opponents say that the path toward differentiation brings about increasing institutional stratification which accelerates inequalities and jeopardises social mobility. Across the Western Balkans we observe a variety of government action directed towards institutional diversity.

The governments can decisively steer the system towards institutional diversity. The expectation that, given enough independence, autonomous institutions will automatically diversify when operating in a competitive market has largely been rejected. In the absence of government intervention, institutions are inclined to become alike which would ultimately result in institutional convergence within the systems. With three main types of interventions available, governments can change this development.

The *first* type includes formal regulations of the types of institutions and their programme types (academic versus professional) and degree levels. Scholarly evidence suggests that the more structurally diverse the system (e.g. through binarity), the more likely institutions will further diversify their profiles. *Second*, funding is widely perceived as the most effective policy instrument to promote differentiation; a funding scheme that is overtly directed at institutional differentiation is seen as the best strategy to achieve this goal. *Third*, accreditation and quality assurance procedures are seen as important accompanying measures reinforcing the differentiation policy. They are, however, unlikely to enforce diversity objectives on

their own in the absence of an appropriate funding regime. The following sections depict the processes of differentiation in the Western Balkan countries in view of these possible types of government intervention.

### Types and forms of differentiation

The higher education systems in the region do not comply with what can be described as an ‘*ideal*’ *binary system*. We observe a certain streamlining of the non-university sector into typically one or two distinguishable types of institutions. Only in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is such streamlining prompted through legislation. In the other countries, the non-university sector continues to be fragmented. The independent (self-standing) faculties – one of the regional idiosyncrasies (see *Chapter 5*) – are adding to this fragmentation. The borders between the university and non-university sector are blurred and permeable. Universities can offer both academic and professional study programmes. At the same time, they do not have the exclusive right to conduct academic degree programmes; although in most countries, but not all, they have the exclusive right to confer third-cycle degrees.

The region hosts a complex mix of different types of *non-university institutions*. Among these some differ from universities only in name, size of the student body and spread of the programmatic offer (like private self-standing faculties in Slovenia or academies in Albania). Others, like polytechnics and higher professional schools in Croatia, fit the ‘*ideal*’ type of exclusively professional higher education provider with an overt regional development strategy. The ambition of the non-university sector, which offers academic degrees, is tending towards gradual development into (comprehensive) universities. At the same time, the universities continue to keenly provide professional degree programmes, often in dislocated regional centres and with a majority of self-paying students.

### Funding regimes and differentiation

One of the major obstacles to serious differentiation policy in the region is in *uniform funding regimes*, which – broadly speaking – distribute funding across institutions by taking criteria into account such as the number of enrolled students. In addition, typically, there are resources for development tasks and activities which are offered separately and in an insufficient size. However, funding models are changing rapidly throughout the region. The impetus comes largely from European recommendations for performance (output) based funding with an explicit diversity objective.

Slovenia and Croatia have already incorporated into their strategy plans (but not yet implemented) the principle of rewarding performance on the basis of the agreed strategic goals and institutional profiles in addition to the basic lump-sum financing. Other countries in the region are in the process of reforming their higher education funding systems.

### Quality assurance and differentiation

The existing *accreditation mechanisms* in the region are typically based on a set of uniform criteria and indicators for institutional and study programme evaluation, and institutions seek to reach the minimum indicators in order to obtain accreditation. Although legal provisions for external accreditation bodies and procedures have been introduced in all countries (also see *Chapter 6*), our interviewees express concern over how reliable the existing accreditation standards and procedures are in practice.

*I think that external accreditation is legally formulated in a way that those responsible for accreditation should make an evaluation [of institutions]. Therefore I do not understand whether those responsible for accreditation are marginally willing or not at all willing to exert their role and thus influence the higher education system. If they were willing to perform their tasks correctly and there was a rigorous Accreditation Commission, at least 30% of faculties in our country – public and private – would not pass such accreditation (Interview 23; 01/03/2012).*

The importance of external quality assurance features in policy documents in all countries, but only the most recent Slovenian and Croatian policy documents amplify the role of Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) also in promoting institutional profiling. Two countries, Albania and Macedonia, have ventured on *national institutional rankings*. The interviews with institutional leaders and the survey of academic opinions show that international university rankings are a relevant factor in defining institutional goals and strategies and that research excellence is an ambition prevalent in all countries (see *Chapter 7*).

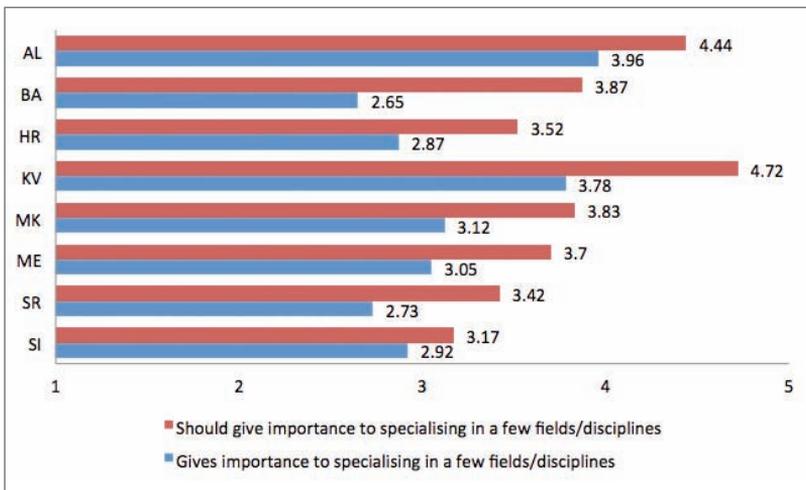
### The external policy influence and academic attitudes on differentiation

The European Union's *modernisation agenda*, which highlights the central role higher education plays in the knowledge-based economy, has gradually but firmly diffused into the national contexts of the eight countries. Their research policies are closely aligned with the European

Union's recommendations on increasing expenditure on research, identifying and developing areas of research excellence, building centres of excellence and research networks, developing links to industry and strengthening mechanisms for knowledge transfer. The changing conception of knowledge in the economy is having a profound impact on higher education policy and structures. Measuring research output and its quality has prominently risen up the higher education political agenda in all countries. It has been translated into developing complex formulas for the distribution of competitive research funding, external evaluations of universities, and – even – national rankings of institutions.

Even among the academics the idea that their university should *specialise in a few fields/disciplines* appears fairly acceptable even if not outright desirable. In the survey we asked academics what they think is the current importance attached in their institutions to certain initiatives and then what should be the importance attached by their institution to those initiatives. The answer that their university should put an emphasis to specialise in a few fields/disciplines was ranked between 3.17 (Slovenia) to 4.73 (Macedonia) on a scale 1 – low priority and 5 – high priority, which is fairly, but not overwhelmingly, positive in view of the whole selection of questions (*Figure 4*).

**Figure 4:** My institution currently gives vs. should give the following importance (5: *high priority*; 1: *no priority*) to the issue of specialising in a few fields/disciplines; by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)



Judging from the policy initiatives, *research quality* is clearly becoming the key defining element of institutional differentiation. The policy emphasis of research excellence has increased segmentation between research universities and non-university institutions, most of which have no or a weak research function. The challenge for the governments is to promote *professional* and *vocational institutions* in the landscape of knowledge producers and channel funds to support them in this role. Non-university institutions are typically regarded as those of lower quality standards rather than ‘of their own kind’ with a distinct profile, and serving a particular aim in teaching, research and service to the community. Placing these institutions at the core of the regional development agenda is a helpful step in this direction.

### A growing number of private institutions and differentiation

For the past decade, the most prevalent element of differentiation policy in the region has been the *liberal policy* on private higher education provision. The private higher education sector is important in all countries in the Western Balkans. It absorbs on average about 19% of the student population in the region, but with varying proportions in different countries (see *Figure 9*). It emerges from our interviews that public versus private higher education provision has been one of the most contested political issues of the last decade. There were two reasons for this. One is that private institutions have been trespassing into the domain of the established public universities in terms of sharing resources and attracting students.

The second reason is in the often shady background of the establishment of private institutions marked by commercial interests and low financial investment leading to insufficient resources for quality educational provision.

*That new [private] institutions were established is not ground breaking, but that institutions were established that have reached into the domains of old public universities (Interview 46; 10/04/2012).*

*In the region we have a flood of private faculties. Adequate accreditation standards need to be urgently formulated and these faculties need to be evaluated according to these standards. Private faculties often do poor work. [...] They are established out of political reasons with support from individual politicians (Interview 23; 01/03/2012).*

From the diversity point of view, the emergence of private institutions does not appear to contribute significantly to programmatic diversity. The vast majority of programmes offered by private institutions are in the social sciences and especially in lucrative and low-cost areas such as business and tourism. As stated by an interviewee:

*With the massification of higher education, the government just copied the existing faculties in other small towns. They did not create other types of institutions, which is appropriate [in such a case]. On the other hand, [our system] is too horizontal. We have all fields of studies almost everywhere. The question here is diversity versus open access. All governments in the region copy-paste each other; they [share] a populist approach to allow access to everybody. Access confronts the diversity; immediate access without any strategy and policy (Interview 01; 08/02/2012).*

### Conclusion

Attempts at understanding the differentiation processes and institutional diversity in the Western Balkans countries are too rare. These countries have been strikingly absent from the vast research on this topic conducted in other parts of the world. In addition, the aggregate collections of statistical data on institutions (size of the student body, programmatic and degree spread, distance learning provision, number of academics etc.) within the region are often incomplete or unreliable and vary immensely from country to country. Collecting such data would be a helpful step in further – much desired – analyses of the institutional diversity within and between the national systems of the Western Balkans.

Up until the most recent higher education reforms the government policies did not have a clear differentiation strategy. It is a new development that the diversity objective is entering the policy agenda; and still in most countries more unequivocally in research rather than in higher education policy. The current discourse and behaviour of governments is importantly shaped by the intentions on making higher education better serve the imagined knowledge economy. The most forthcoming policy instruments in the area of institutional diversity appear in the pursuit of research excellence.

## Chapter 5

### HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF UNIVERSITIES

The historical legacy plays an important role in the countries of former Yugoslavia. Prior to 1990, the model of the socialist self-managed society and economy was also applied to the governance of the higher education system and higher education institutions. The basic legal entities were faculties, art academies and colleges – not the university which was merely an umbrella institution without many managerial and academic powers. Universities were thus associations of heterogeneous institutions (faculties, academies, two- and four-year colleges), differing in their standards, financing, activities and other elements of organisation.

#### The fragmentation of universities

Our research results show that the *'fragmented university'* is still persisting in the countries of former Yugoslavia and that there is not much motivation in academia to change this particular element of higher education institutions' governance. On the other hand, policy documents across the region stress it as an important issue in higher education reforms. There have been many discussions in the past two decades on how to integrate universities (including the rulings of the constitutional courts in Slovenia and Croatia in the late 1990s which were substantially different: in Croatia the legal entity of faculties was retained and in Slovenia it was abandoned). It is often and in all countries possible to observe a discrepancy between the interviewees from the faculties (e.g. deans) and the respondents to our survey questionnaire on one hand and the rectors, representatives of ministries and experts on the other. They all report that the fragmented university is problematic and at the same time that it is difficult to change this arrangement. For instance, one of them says:

*This is the main critical problem of Croatian higher education. This [fragmentation of universities] is causing problems in every thinkable way of higher education activity. All of them. Working posts, finances, strategy, teaching, the recognition of qualifications, research. All. Imagine a situation in which you cannot make one decision about any question without talking to 30 different people [e.g. deans], every one of whom has a right to veto and to lobby against your coordinative role. Thirty people. Put 30 people around a table and try to agree on*

*anything. [e.g. reforms, strategies, goals, organisational issues etc.] It does not happen (Interview 34; 16/03/2012).*

On the other hand, *institutional integration* is mainly promoted by national authorities, quality assurance bodies and to some extent rectors. Deans, on the contrary, often report that faculties should keep their level of ‘freedom’ and that there should be some sort of ‘*functional integration*’ instead.

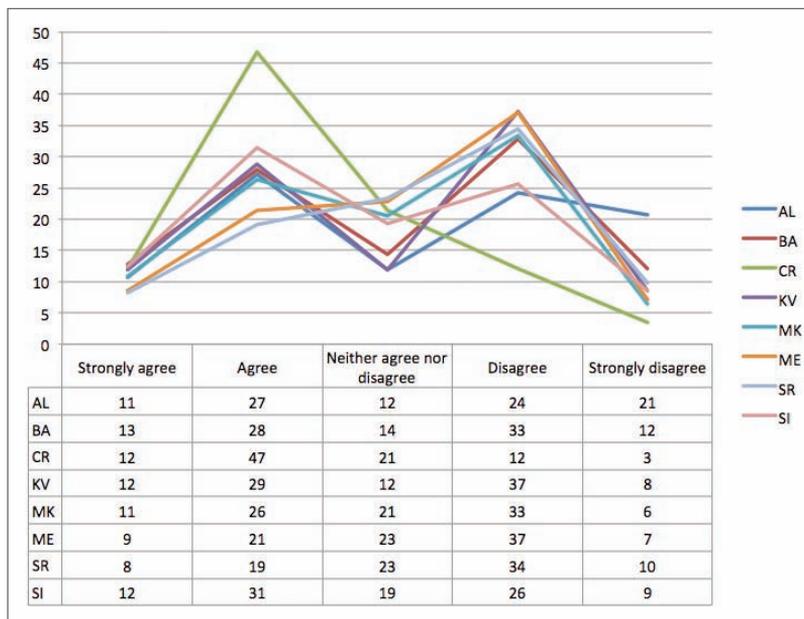
Slovenia is the only country where faculties are not their own full legal entity. However, in practice the situation is quite similar to other countries, at least at the flagship university (the University of Ljubljana which is the largest with approximately 50,000 students). Some procedures like the transfer of public funds, the capacity to sign legal documents, internal quality assurance and communication with the government are arranged at the level of the university, but otherwise the faculties remain largely free. In the majority of other countries that emerged in the territory of former Yugoslavia faculties are legal bodies independent of the ‘university’ which is mainly understood as the Rector’s office and the Senate.

According to the interviews, the primary reason for the resistance to integration is the *funds that are earned in the market by individual faculties*. They apparently fear that they would have to share these funds, which they have earned and wish to earmark for their own initiatives or capacity building, with other allegedly ‘less productive’ faculties and ‘university bureaucracy’.

Quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire reveal that *academic staff is divided on the issue of integration* when asked about the financial and strategic decision making. In all of the countries, except Croatia, academics have divided views as to who – university leadership or faculty leadership – should take most of the decisions and responsibility regarding financing and strategic priorities. Of all eight countries, university integration is most highly supported by academics in Croatia (see *Figure 5*).

It seems that the dichotomy of university ‘*fragmentation*’ vs. ‘*integration*’ is causing tensions in the national higher education spaces. Nevertheless, there are clear signs that the majority of academia would prefer to keep the system as it is with only minor changes that some of them call ‘*functional integration*’ which actually refers to better cooperation between faculties.

**Figure 5:** The university leadership, not the faculty leadership, should take most of decisions and responsibility regarding financing and strategic priorities – distribution of responses (in proportions) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)



### Professional management vs. collegial governance

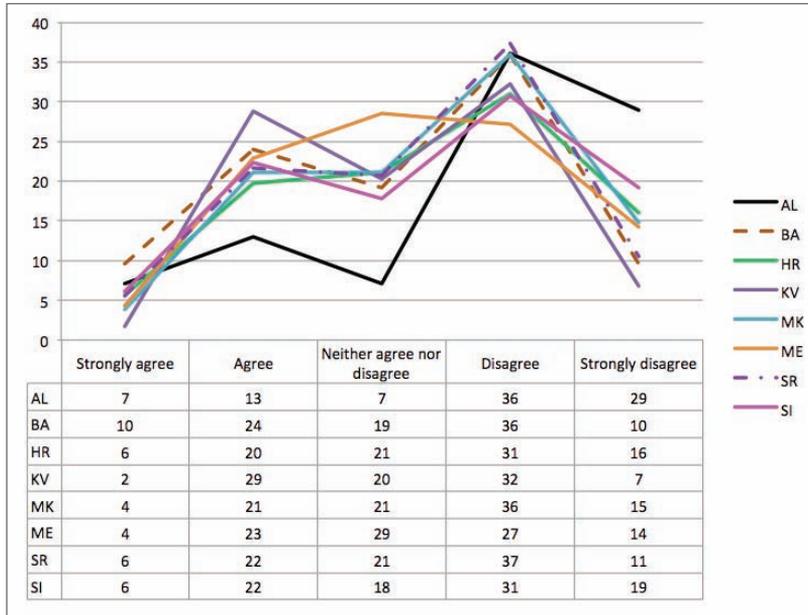
Respondents to the questionnaire were divided in their opinions on whether decisions are currently passed without the consent of academic staff. Only in Serbia and Croatia did a significant number of respondents agree with this statement.

In Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, the interview data suggest it is necessary or *inevitable to professionalise the management of universities*. In Serbia the interviewees reported that currently there are *problems with collegial governance* and academics do not realise that they could achieve more with better organisation. In Croatia, the interviewees reported that collegial governance in combination with autonomous faculties is obstructing the decision-making process and strategic work of universities. In Slovenia, such problems were not specifically reported in the interviews but the professionalisation of governance is expected in the future due to European and international trends.

On the other hand, the academic body at large (as testified by responses to the questionnaire) was primarily against the idea that governance should

be professionalised. Among the academic staff, *collegial governance seems to hold ground in the region* as opposed to introducing professional management or central administration at the university level (see Figure 6).

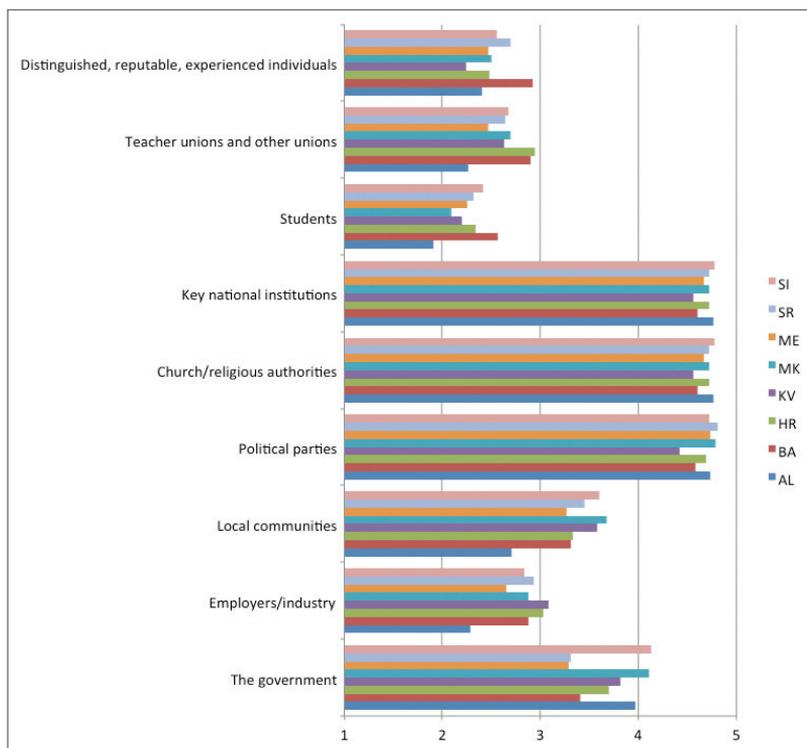
**Figure 6:** Collegial governance is inefficient. Key decision-making competencies should be passed from academics to a professional director (or manager) and management structure – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)



### Representation in the decision-making bodies

The respondents to the questionnaire consistently state that political parties, church and national institutions (like academies of science etc.) should not participate in the decision-making bodies of higher education institutions. In addition, the participation of local communities and the government are also not favoured. On the other hand, students, teacher unions and 'experienced individuals' are seen to be the favoured groups in such structures. Employers are not contested; they are most favoured in Albania. Thus, in the countries of former Yugoslavia some sort of collegial governance without strong external representation is obviously preferred (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7:** The following stakeholders should be members of the decision-making structures at my institution – average grading (1: *strongly agree*, 5: *strongly disagree*) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)

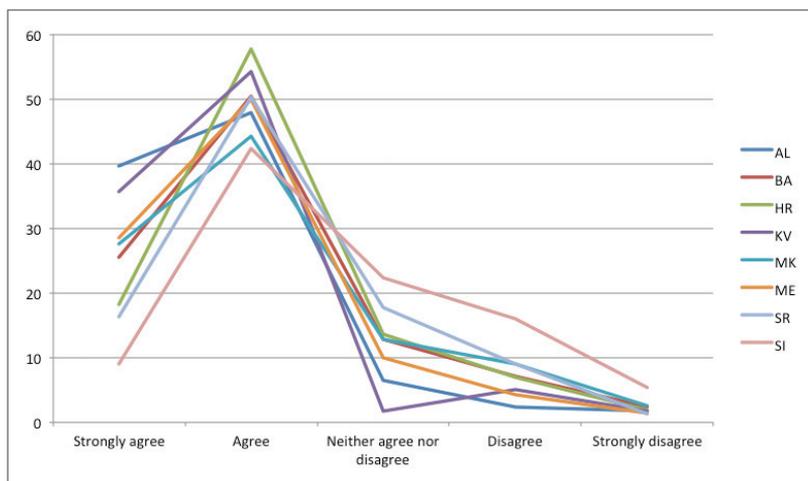


### Internal and external quality assurance

In all analysed countries the interviewees support accreditation and see it as a necessary accountability tool. It is not regarded as being in contradiction with academic autonomy. Complementing this, the vast majority of respondents to the questionnaire in the region also agree with the need for external quality assurance (see *Figure 8*).

The respondents to the questionnaire perceive that currently it is mainly the university that influences internal quality assurance, which is in line with university autonomy. In their opinion, only in Montenegro and Macedonia do international organisations influence it as well to some extent.

**Figure 8:** An external body (a council for higher education or an agency for quality assurance) should evaluate and accredit university study programmes – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)



### University autonomy

Discourses on autonomy in the interviews reveal that there is a general understanding of autonomy which can be symbolically categorised in *two dimensions*: 'financial' and 'academic'.

In *Slovenia*, the interviewees interpreted autonomy mainly as having a lump-sum financial system in place and as a right to select students, staff and care for quality. There were also ideas of autonomy belonging to individual (academic) professions/fields. Respondents included accountability as a necessary part of autonomy. In addition, they commented on the fragmentation of universities, stating that there is external and internal autonomy. The interviewed deans especially elaborated on the idea that only the smallest number of issues should be coordinated and managed at the university level.

In *Croatia*, the predominant understanding of autonomy is equal to academic freedom or something that guarantees academic freedom. In addition, some interviewees included issues like freedom to decide about the goals and strategies of the university. Accountability is viewed as integral to autonomy, implying responsibility towards the state and society as opposed to an autarchic 'ivory tower'. Interestingly, many interviewees hold negative views about autonomy, stating that too much autonomy is

not desired. In addition, the interviewees would like to see certain issues decided by the state, e.g. issues which are seen as unquestionable matters of university autonomy in the contemporary European policy like criteria for academic career advancement or decisions on the number of enrolled students.

In *Serbia*, the idea of autonomy is connected to academic freedom but, similarly to Croatia, the responses in the interviews contain many ideas on how this can lead to non-transparency and a lack of responsibility. The interviewees commented that the tradition of self-governance has resulted in the significant autonomy of individuals and their irresponsible behaviour to the detriment of institutional quality.

In *Albania*, the interviewees consistently communicate the two categories outlined above: academic and financial autonomy. They also see autonomy as something that means decentralisation from the ministry and, in addition, as a right to operate freely with the private sector (own income, spin offs). In Albania, the majority of interviewees believe that the level of academic autonomy is currently high or properly achieved – despite the considerable state regulation (e.g. in terms of student enrolment or curricula).

A peculiar case of the under-regulation of higher education in the region is *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In one of the political units – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the regulatory competencies over higher education are unclearly divided and dispersed between small cantons (10 of them) and upper levels of governance. This results in a lack of skilled policy-making staff and reflected and coherent public policy in the field of higher education. In these unclear conditions, the universities often emerge as the policy makers and policy implementers at the same time.

## Conclusion

The ‘fragmented university’ remains a recognised reality in the national higher education systems of the countries which emerged in the territory of former Yugoslavia. There have been discussions on integration and initiatives to integrate faculties within individual universities (with a few cases of ‘good practice’), but *the main problems seem to remain*: (1) the historical legacy of the relatively self-standing faculties; (2) the strong individual freedom of (senior) academics; and (3) the unwillingness of faculties to share the funds they have earned in the market. Academics in general do not seem to be motivated enough to change this situation

and to integrate universities. However, this is the desired goal of policy makers at the national level.

In general, the interviewed policy makers, civil servants and senior university managers would like the *development of university governance to take a 'professionalisation' turn*, while on the other hand the majority of academic staff prefer to *keep collegial governance* and do not particularly welcome the inclusion of external stakeholders in the governance bodies. External quality assurance is highly supported in the region and is not a cause of tensions or dilemmas.

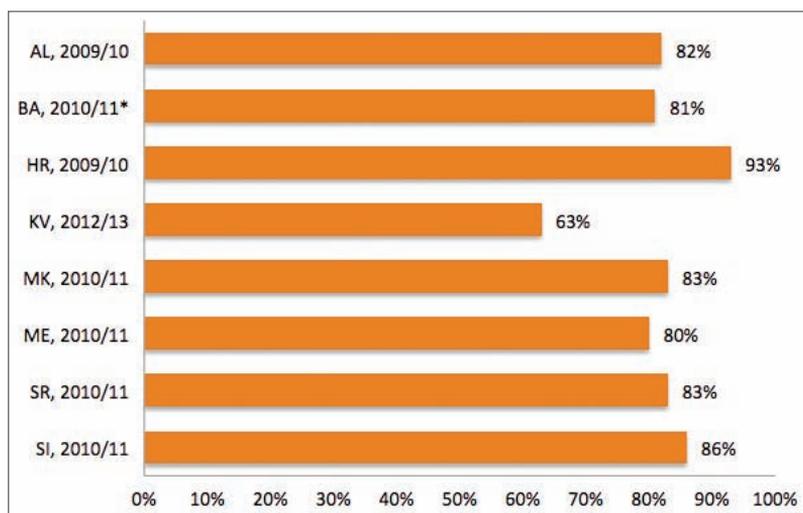
It seems that *university autonomy* is widely understood in the region today as it was understood in Western Europe in the past (before the 2000s), namely as *a value that is strongly connected to* (or equivalent to) *academic freedom*. Despite the tendency to perceive financial management as a dimension of autonomy, the idea of autonomy as a managerial instrument (in the sense brought about by the EU's modernisation agenda or the EUA's documents) has not been domesticated in the Western Balkans. Moreover, the promotion of increasing autonomy that is noticed in the EU and EUA documents is not fully supported, e.g. some of the interviewed policy makers in Croatia and Serbia view the extended autonomy as a potential threat to the development of higher education.

## Chapter 6

### PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Private higher education institutions are present in all countries of the Western Balkans, but to varying extents in the different countries (see *Figure 9*), the most enrolled students are in Kosovo (37%) and the least in Croatia (7%). Although the number of private higher education institutions is high in all countries (see *Table 1*), they tend to be small in size averaging 500 or fewer students, in some cases only a few dozen. About 20 institutions enrol more than 1,000 students, with Singidunum University in Serbia being the largest (8,928 students enrolled).<sup>3</sup> The flagship public universities in national capitals (e.g. Belgrade with around 90,000, Zagreb with around 70,000 and Ljubljana with around 50,000 students) still tend to dominate the entire system in terms of student enrolments and resources.

**Figure 9:** Students in public higher education institutions – percentage by countries



**Note:**

\* These data present the number of enrolled students in *public* higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska, but without data for the Brčko District. Data for the Brčko District could not be obtained.

(Source: Compiled from national statistics offices)

3 See the details presented by J. Branković at <http://www.herdata.org/in-focus/the-rise-and-growth-of-private-higher-education-in-the-western-balkans-a-temporary-trend/31>

**Table 1:** Number of higher education institutions per countries: university and non-university, private and public, academic year 2010/11.

Country	All public HEIs*	Public university	Public non-univ.	All private HEIs*	Private university	Private non-univ.
AL	<b>14</b>	10	4	<b>46</b>	3	43
BA	<b>10</b>	8	2	<b>33</b>	17	16
HR	<b>22</b>	7	15	<b>33</b>	3	30
KV**	<b>5</b>	4	1	<b>22</b>	1	21
MK	<b>5</b>	5	0	<b>19</b>	10	9
ME	<b>1</b>	1	0	<b>9</b>	2	7
SR	<b>49</b>	7***	42	<b>23</b>	8	16
SI	<b>4</b>	3	1	<b>41</b>	2	39

**Notes:**

\* In the count of institutions we have not included the units of foreign universities in the region.

\*\* Data for Kosovo are for 2012/13

\*\*\* In the official statistics of the Republic of Serbia, the University in Mitrovica (officially referred to as University of Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica) figures as the eight Serbian university; the institution is located in the territory of Kosovo (under UN resolution 1244) and therefore subject to political and territorial tensions. See <http://www.pr.ac.rs/en/home/about-the-university/university-today>.

(Source: Compiled from national statistics offices)

### The phenomenon of mushrooming private institutions

The phenomenon of mushrooming private higher education institutions stems from the particular transitional circumstances in the region combined with a rapid increase in student demand. Several countries, especially those also involved in armed conflict, lacked the capacity to develop a comprehensive higher education policy and strategy, and thus resorted to an ad-hoc approach. This approach was marked by reliance on market forces, which – besides being fashionable amidst the transitional enthusiasm – represented hope for the quick recovery of the higher education system and an increase in both enrolment capacity and quality through competition. As stated on the website of the Albanian Department of Private Education Development: “*private education [is] considered an important alternative in the provision of public services in the field of education, which improves the conditions under which the market operates, enhances competitiveness and encourages educational service quality*”.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the competition was expected to increase the diversity of the educational provision to cater for the modernising world of work.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.mash.gov.al/faqe.php?id1=1&id2=155&lang=en>

In Albania and Kosovo, *public* institutions charge tuition fees for students enrolled as full-time students in the first-cycle programmes. However, for some time already public institutions elsewhere in the region have been unable to enrol all interested students in their publicly-funded programmes.<sup>5</sup> They have responded by offering programmes for self-paying ('non-budget') students (also see *Chapter 9*). In countries such as Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro, public higher education follows a dual tuition system that admits some students tuition-free based on state quotas. The others who do not qualify for the highly competitive tuition-free admissions enrol in the programmes as self-paying students paying a tuition fee. In Slovenia, the law (since 1993) does not allow this option; however, if there are not enough places for all candidates in full-time studies those who do not qualify can enrol in part-time studies – upon payment of a fee (e.g. in law, economics and management, sometimes in the humanities etc.).

The public financing of *private institutions* varies across the region. For example, in Montenegro the amended Higher Education Law (2010) has also made it possible that certain study programmes carried out at private institutions can be funded by the government if identified as being of strategic importance for the government. In the case of Slovenia, the government grants concessions to certain study programmes at private institutions. In some countries (e.g. Slovenia), students from private institutions are eligible for social benefits such as student scholarships, loans and access to publicly-funded student housing. Moreover, academics from private institutions can in several countries compete for research funding on equal terms as those from public institutions.

The combination of the liberal regulation of private higher education provision, the rising student demand and the dual tuition systems at public institutions have presented enabling conditions for the emergence of private higher education provision and opened a niche for business entrepreneurs.

### **The consequences of deregulation and expansion of private higher education**

Yet in most of the examined countries the experience with the private sector has been uneasy, if not outright negative. The fast growth in the number of private institutions is seen as having been enabled by the “*very*

5 Country reports found at <http://www.herdata.org/activities/country-reports/68> include information on tuition fees in all of the examined countries, except Slovenia.

*low criteria set and absence of strict conditions*” (interview 73; 26/03/2012). This rapid development of private institutions was not followed by accordingly strict regulation to assure quality or accredit programmes and institutions. The expansion of the private sector occurred relatively fast, while the development of quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms has been slow (with Kosovo and Croatia slightly ahead of the others), and is still far from representing a reliable and well-functioning regulation instrument. Private providers were seen as important for catering to the growing student demand. Hence, the focus has been on system expansion and this is only slowly moving now into regulation in terms of quality assurance and accreditation. However, the rapid growth of students has started to stop or even decline in recent years (see *Figure 1*), which may have an impact on this aspect of the reforms in the future.

One of the interviewees expressed the delusion as follows:

*I think that in these lands of ours private initiative has been allowed too soon – not only on the higher education level, but also on other levels of education. [...] When we get the right to establish a private Faculty or University we will do this – not for the sake of the prosperity of our community, [...] but because we need money for our private pockets. The private higher education institutions – not only in [our country], but in the broader region – are in the first place commercially oriented. (Interview 66; 27/03/2012).*

Others point to the preferential treatment of private higher education institutions due to the private interests of some (former) public officials, e.g.: “*They are protected by politicians and those who have a stake in them and are influential*” (interview 66; 27/03/2012). There is also a *political dimension motivating the establishment of private faculties* as a counter-balance to the public institutions deemed to be dominated by the elites from the socialist pre-transition times. In some countries, several private institutions are publicly perceived as being led by and employing academics from a specific political milieu. All of these anomalies are seen to have detrimental effects on both the value of education and the countries’ development.

Except for a few cases of foreign franchised or internationally backed universities (e.g. American University Kosovo; South East European University in Macedonia) and a few with a clear profile and open and transparent operations, the private institutions typically represent a *second choice*

– an alternative for those school leavers who do not make it to the public ones. In the words of one interviewee:

[Private institutions] *are the lower level institutions in terms of quality. [...] They attract students who did not pass the entrance exams to public universities* (Interview 67; 26/03/2012).

Where the regulation does not explicitly define the status of a university, the private institutions tend to use the name “university” in their designation even if their programmatic offer is vocational or exclusively short-cycle. This situation is particularly pervasive in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Private institutions tend to also cater to a large proportion of mature students who seek to obtain credentials while working. In the public perception, these institutions lower the examination criteria in order to let most of their students pass.

Private institutions have typically been founded with a *minimal financial investment* and to a great extent depend on teachers from public institutions working for both their home institution and the private one in addition. Part-time employment, contract work and the employment of practitioners and teaching staff without a doctorate is the predominant practice. The interviewees report that the initially expected improvements in higher education following the private sector’s growth were considerably inhibited by the effect of commuting academic staff and academics bringing to the private sector “*the old habits and therefore hampered the expected change*” (interview 53; 15/03/2012). In those countries where the private sector has proliferated the most (Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia), the multiple employment of professors has also substantially deteriorated the education process at the public universities. Public universities in several countries (e.g. Albania, Montenegro, Slovenia) have reacted to this by introducing a competition clause preventing academics from public universities working simultaneously in private institutions without the permission of the rector or altogether in its regulation or employment contracts.

At the systemic level, the emergence of private institutions does not appear to significantly contribute to *programme diversity* either (also see *Chapter 4*). The vast majority of programmes offered by the private sector are in the social sciences and especially in lucrative and low-cost areas such as business and tourism. These programmes sometimes differ from the programmes offered by public institutions only by name and marketing. Public institutions are not completely unapt, even if somewhat

slower, to adjust their programmatic offer to the demands of – especially – paying students. Hence, we witness the duplication of programmes in particular study areas.

Various governments address the rapid increase in the number of private institutions in different ways (especially through quality assurance mechanisms) and with different rates of success. In all countries, the responsibility lies with *external accreditation bodies* (or the National Higher Education Council where no Agency has been established). In Albania, where the increase in institutions is the highest, the government uses soft mechanisms like rating and ranking in an attempt to increase transparency. National ranking has also been implemented in Macedonia.<sup>6</sup> In Kosovo, the government introduced a restrictive accreditation process. On the state level in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no effective regulating of the private provision of higher education despite the established quality assurance agency. The political system and related tensions represent a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to policy initiatives in the field of higher education. However, parallel to the state agency, in one of the Bosnian entities – the Republic of Srpska – the locally established Higher Education Accreditation Agency shows progress in assuring quality across the sector with particular attention to private institutions. Quality Assurance Agencies in Slovenia and Croatia also work to the same effect. Yet in the interviews our respondents in all countries reiterated that work in this area remains to be done.

## Conclusion

In our field research we encountered elevated tension between the public and private higher education providers in basically all of the examined countries despite the fact that the higher education systems are still dominated by public institutions. Several developments appear to heighten these tensions. One is that private higher education institutions continue to assert themselves for better or equal treatment vis-à-vis public institutions. The request for full access to social benefits for students and research grants for academics is one of such developments. Such assertions would perhaps not be taken too seriously if private higher education were not often backed by politically and/or economically powerful individuals, who indeed have a realistic chance (and a strong private interest) to influence policy decisions to the benefit of private higher education institutions. The competition for self-paying students between and among private and public institutions continues to rise.

.....  
6 See [http://www.shanghairanking.com/Macedonian\\_HEIs\\_Ranking/](http://www.shanghairanking.com/Macedonian_HEIs_Ranking/)

Further, there are many ‘rotten apples’ among the private higher education institutions. Just a mere glimpse at the publicly available websites of several private institutions points to degree-mill practices: there is no indication of the teaching staff, no contact addresses of teachers and dubious descriptions of study programmes, international cooperation and research. Such foul players are damaging to the few private institutions that do offer quality study programmes and are transparent about their educational operations. Finally, the expectation that the emergence of private higher education provision would significantly diversify the educational offer and that the ensuing competition would result in the improved quality of all higher education institutions and thus of entire higher education systems have not been met. The calls for stronger regulation, greater transparency and the prevention of fraud in private higher education are persistent across the region.

*What we are doing in the last decade in higher education I fear will leave negative impact [on our society and economy] for next 50 years. Each generation which we have educated poorly will create negative effects on us and our children for the next 20 to 30 years (Interview 23; 01/03/2012).*



## Chapter 7

### HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ROLES

As noted by vast research, the roles of higher education in the past two or three decades have been substantially changing in Europe and elsewhere, e.g. higher education has become subordinated to economic development and some scholars are revealing the increasing trend of viewing higher education as industry or commodity. Roles like caring for the economic development of the country, creating jobs and companies, educating human capital with the right mix of skills for the labour market etc. are becoming discursively accentuated. Higher education institutions are expected to compete in the global market, specialise, strategise and more or less behave according to the market rules similarly to the behaviour of companies. Even though politically committed to the European values and normative space, the region of the Western Balkans often reveals idiosyncrasies rooted in its historical development and social setting. As one of the central institutions in society, universities are expected to assume a central role in the transformation of post-socialist and post-conflict societies in the region which sometimes does not correspond to the priorities and trends in the rest of Europe.

While the chapter on regional distinctions underlying higher education (*Chapter 2*) is dedicated to the discursive categories that emerged from the interviews, this chapter sheds light on the perception of the teaching staff on the current and preferred roles of higher education institutions.

#### Current and preferred focus of higher education institutions

Perhaps the most revealing questions on the roles of higher education institutions in the questionnaire administered to the teaching staff are:

- My faculty (my university) currently puts the following importance on the issues listed in the table.
- In my opinion, my faculty (my university) should put the following importance on the issues listed in the table.

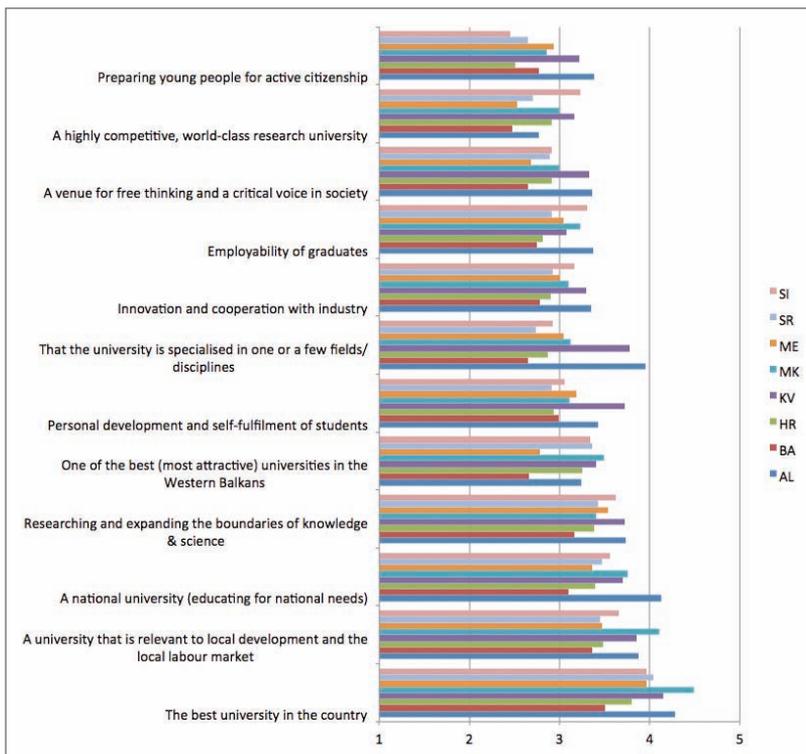
We wanted to find out what they think about the *current emphasis* of their higher education institution regarding certain issues (e.g. employability, personal development, innovation, specialisation, being the best in the

country etc.) and then what the focus of their higher education institution *should be* according to their opinion.

Regarding the *current situation* (see Figure 10), respondents in all countries think that their institutions put the greatest emphasis on: (1) being the best university in the country; (2) being a national university; (3) serving local development and the local labour market; and (4) focussing on research and expanding knowledge. These results might also reflect the fact that most of the respondents came from the national flagship universities, which in these countries can be understood to be: national universities as they have the most students in the country; the oldest in the country; they are seen to be the best in the country and having the greatest research capacity. There is the exception of Kosovo where a large share of respondents also stresses the role of the university to specialise in one or a few fields.

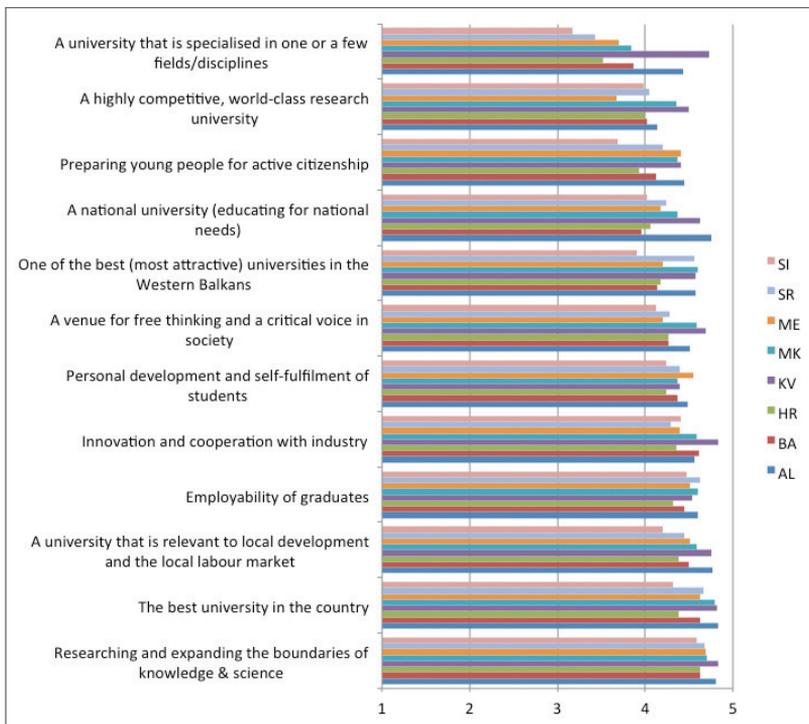
In all countries except Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, the roles of (1) preparing young people for active citizenship; and (2) a venue for free

**Figure 10:** The current focus of higher education institutions as perceived by respondents (5: *very important*; 1: *not important*) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)



thinking and a critical voice in society were evaluated lowly. It seems that in these three countries the majority of respondents think that universities are (still) serving the *role of reconstruction of society* or, at least, that they should play this role. In addition, in all countries except Slovenia and Croatia the focus on 'being a highly competitive world class research university' is evaluated lowly. This might be due to the fact that Slovenia and Croatia are the two countries that have changed their institutional systems the most since the break-up of Yugoslavia and are the economically most developed as well as the most marked by EU policy.

**Figure 11:** The desired focus of higher education institutions as perceived by respondents (5: *very important*; 1: *not important*) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)



Regarding the *desired focus* of higher education institutions (see Figure 11), it is important to note that the respondents evaluated all of the proposed categories very highly with the majority of categories receiving a score above 4 on the 5-level scale. This means that the respondents believe their higher education institutions should increase their focus on all of the proposed categories. Caution is therefore needed in interpreting these results as no generalisations can be made. However, certain trends appear.

Respondents in all countries think that their institutions *should* put the greatest emphasis on ‘research and expanding knowledge’. Next to this, they think there should be a stronger focus on ‘being the best university in the country’. ‘Employability’ is somewhere in the middle with the exception of Slovenia and Serbia where it is positioned higher. Catering to the ‘local development and local labour market’ is at the top (although slightly lower in Slovenia, Serbia and Macedonia).

Moreover, the majority of respondents throughout the region agree that the *labour market should be the main priority in teaching and in designing curricula*.

### Serve the economy, be competitive and contribute to critical thinking

Interesting results appear if the 12 categories the respondents evaluated in these two questions are arranged in three groups, pragmatically named ‘economy’, ‘competition’ and ‘broader societal’ as presented in *Table 2*.

**Table 2:** Grouping of the options the respondents evaluated as the current and preferred focus of their higher education institution

Groups of categories	Category
Broader societal roles	Personal development and self-fulfilment of students
	Preparing young people for active citizenship
	A venue for free thinking and a critical voice in society
Economic roles	Employability of graduates
	Innovation and cooperation with industry
	A university that is relevant to local development and the local labour market
Competition	A highly competitive, world-class research university
	One of the best (most attractive) universities in the Western Balkans
	The best university in the country

The trend in all countries – except Montenegro – is that ‘*economic roles*’ and ‘*competition*’ are at the top of the *desired focus* and only then come ‘broader societal roles’ (see *Figure 11*). This indicates that the majority of academics in the Western Balkans have consistently adopted the roles of higher education in line with the EU’s political rationale best known under the label of the *knowledge-based economy*.

## Discrepancy between the perceptions of the current and preferred focus

To compare the scores by country regarding the *desired* and *current priorities* (see Figure 12), we deducted the scores of the preferred roles and the scores of the current roles and prepared a scale based on the differences. The respondents would like to see an increased emphasis on all of the proposed categories in comparison to the current focus of their institutions. In addition, all categories received very high scores with the exception of 'being specialised in one or more fields' and to some extent the promotion of 'active citizenship' and aiming at the status of a 'world-class research university'.

**Figure 12:** Participants' perceptions (5: very important; 1: not important) by countries: the difference between the *desired* and *current* priorities of their higher education institutions (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)

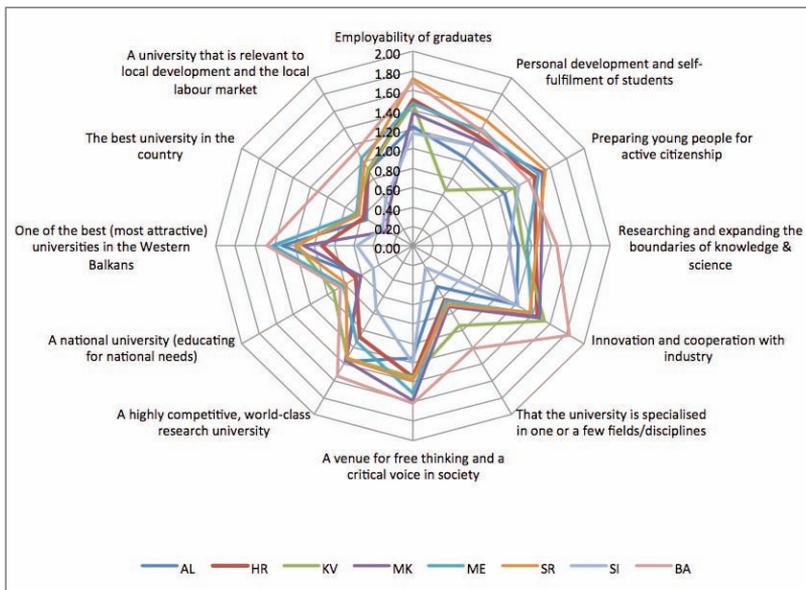


Figure 12 shows a remarkably homogeneous cross-regional pattern of areas and roles where higher education institutions should increase their emphasis. With the exception of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the majority of respondents believe their higher education institutions *should also focus more on the 'broader societal role'*, thus: (1) representing a venue for free thinking; (2) promoting active citizenship; (3) ensuring personal self-fulfilment. These are side by side the preferences for: (4) employability; and (5) cooperation with industry. The results for Albania

and Bosnia and Herzegovina are such because they had already evaluated these roles highly when asked about the current situation. In Albania, competition is higher when checking the discrepancy between the desired focuses and the current ones. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is possible to observe a more even mixture of the three groups of preferred roles. The other trend is that ‘specialised universities’ are not preferred in any of the examined countries.

### Conclusion

The research results suggest there are significant tensions in the region regarding the roles of higher education. Academic staff in all countries tends to prefer the ‘economic roles’ of higher education, which we also found as an emerging trend in the interviews (see *Chapter 2*). This matches the general European trend of viewing higher education as one of the drivers of competitiveness of the region in the global knowledge-based economy. However, the idea of higher education serving the economy is not fully adopted as academics would like to see their institutions focus more strongly on the ‘broader societal roles’ of higher education.

The specific history of the Western Balkans is also reflected in the perception of the role of higher education institutions. The research shows that in the countries where the recent conflict was most serious (i.e. Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina) higher education institutions are seen or expected to contribute to reconstruction of society more than being instrumental to economic growth. To a smaller degree, this can also be observed in some other countries. One may conclude that even though the prioritising of the ‘economic roles’ of higher education institutions is considerably present in all countries of the Western Balkans, the respondents from our sample believe that the ‘broader societal roles’ should play a more important role than they do at the moment.

## Chapter 8

### INTERNATIONALISATION AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The wave of internationalisation that has swept over Europe during the last two decades has not left Europe's periphery unaffected. On the contrary, for countries in the Western Balkan region the internationalisation of higher education has been a salient political issue. However, the rationales in favour of internationalisation in this region highlight different priorities than seen elsewhere. While for developed countries internationalisation is considered a vehicle for enhancing the competitiveness of their higher education institutions and of their economies (often including a notable source of import revenue), internationalisation in the Western Balkans speaks foremost of *supporting national reforms* and *institutional capacity building*. The bulk of internationalisation activities in the region have been conducted with financial support from various international organisations, in particular the EU's programmes such as CARDS, TEMPUS, Framework Programmes and others. Therefore, the *internationalisation of higher education* is often understood in the region as a *policy transfer*. The term "internationalisation" has been often used parallel to the "harmonisation" and also "modernisation" of higher education.

The most frequently funded projects qualify as 'structural measures'; they are geared to tackle various aspects of policy and practice reforms within higher education and research sectors. As a rule, these projects are conducted through international cooperation involving partners from EU member states. Mobility support schemes, such as the EU's programmes Erasmus-Mundus and Erasmus (in Slovenia and Croatia) or the multilateral CEEPUS and CEI, are by comparison a much smaller financial investment, although highly appreciated by the grassroots: domestic students and staff eager to gain experience abroad.

During our field work in the region in 2012, one of our expert interviewees made the following observation: "*The TEMPUS programme is among the best things that has happened to us. [...] Mobility and the transfer of experiences are some of the best things happening in our higher education*" (interview 09; 22/03/2012). And this was not a lone impression: we heard similar statements at other universities in other countries. Our respondents from the flagship universities in the region spoke with high regard of the

impact the various international projects have had on improving teaching and learning quality and research capacity in the region. On the other hand, we heard from one ministerial representative that the government had engaged “*teachers from abroad to show other rotting universities [at home] how to work*” (interview 07; 09/02/2012).

### Enhancing internationalisation at the institutional level

The research team observed a high level of commitment to internationalisation almost everywhere but that university practices and especially support services are not sufficiently adapted to serve this purpose. A strategic approach coordinated across faculties, schools and departments to enable the sharing of good practice and consistent quality in internationalisation practice is largely absent. There are several perceived areas of weakness and at the same time of opportunity. One of these involves ‘internationalisation at home’: improving conditions for outgoing and incoming mobile students and academics, creating at least some opportunities for hiring academics and postdocs and recruiting doctoral candidates from abroad, and engaging in joint/double/multiple study programmes. Implementation of the Bologna recommendations (see *Chapter 3*) and joining relevant common European programmes for cooperation play an essential role here. Some of the shortcomings specifically characterising the region (albeit differently in various parts of the region) are also in the insufficient number of courses offered in foreign languages, improvement in general foreign language skills among students and academics, weak research support and deficient support services (including accommodation).

At the same time, there is significant potential for intraregional cooperation and for internationalisation through intraregional cooperation. Several important initiatives already exist to foster such cooperation in both teaching and research. The *Central European Exchange Program for University Studies* (CEEPUS; a kind of the ‘*Central & South-eastern European Erasmus*’) programme has been running since the early 1990s; today it includes all Western Balkan countries. Further, the *Central European Initiative University Network* (CEI) is a platform for cooperation among higher education institutions in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe and comprises joint study programmes, academic mobility and events. In the area of research, in 2006 the Austrian EU presidency launched the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkans.<sup>7</sup> Through

.....  
7 See <http://wbc-inco.net/>

the Framework Programmes several projects have been supported by EU funds to exchange information and national policy developments. Our interviewees confirm that such projects capitalise on established personal contacts, knowledge of languages and similarities in academic and research culture and contribute importantly to enhancing international cooperation.

During our field work the respondents observed that the single most important driver of international cooperation remains *individual academics*. It is through the bottom-up initiatives of academics that short-term mobility, research cooperation, development of joint study programmes, and other activities are developed. With this in mind, in the next section we review the regional and country preferences of academics for building academic partnerships.

### Regional preferences for building international partnerships

One of the EURYDICE studies of student mobility from 2010<sup>8</sup> clearly shows that EU countries are a priority region for attracting students from Eastern European non-EU countries as well as from new EU member states. Conversely, the ‘new’ EU countries would like to attract students from non-EU Eastern Europe while the non-EU Eastern European countries would like to attract students from their own region, most probably due to their links from the past and their economic, linguistic and cultural characteristics. Further, in one of our previous studies (i.e., a review of TEMPUS Structural Measures 2003 – 2006)<sup>9</sup> we showed that the relatively close neighbourhood and traditional cooperation between individual EU member countries on one hand and partner countries on the other were the main factors of building TEMPUS Structural Measures projects consortia. This is reconfirmed in our present study.

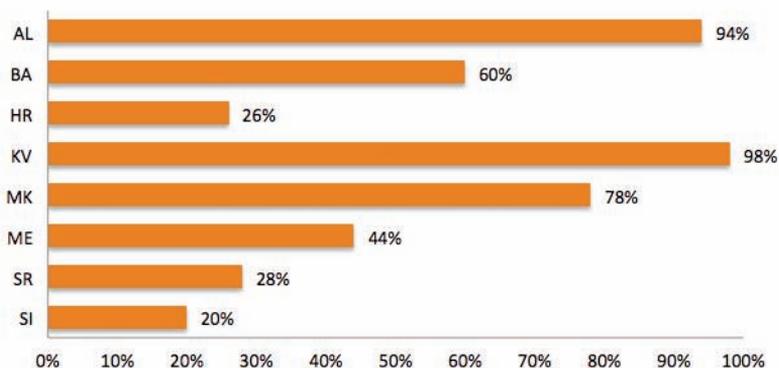
In our opinion survey of academics from the Western Balkans, we tested these findings by asking two sets of questions. First, we asked whether the academics agreed with the following statement: “*My institution should primarily seek cooperation with universities or higher education institutions from the Western Balkans*”. The highest number of those agreeing with this statement came from Kosovo (98.3% of all Kosovar respondents) and Albania (93.5%). The majority of respondents in agreement

8 See [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/122EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf)

9 See [http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si/projekti/int/doc/002%20CEPS%20Tempus\\_Survey\\_FINAL.pdf](http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si/projekti/int/doc/002%20CEPS%20Tempus_Survey_FINAL.pdf)

also came from Macedonia (77.6%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (60%). On the other hand, in the other four countries the majority of respondents disagreed with this statement: Montenegro (44.3%), Serbia (27.5), Croatia (26.2%) and Slovenia (20.4%). It is obvious that, by increasing the opportunities for international cooperation in the 'broadest sense' (these opportunities are much higher e.g. in Slovenia than in Kosovo), interest in the 'narrower' regional cooperation is declining. However, these differences also have much to do with linguistic, cultural and political circumstances.

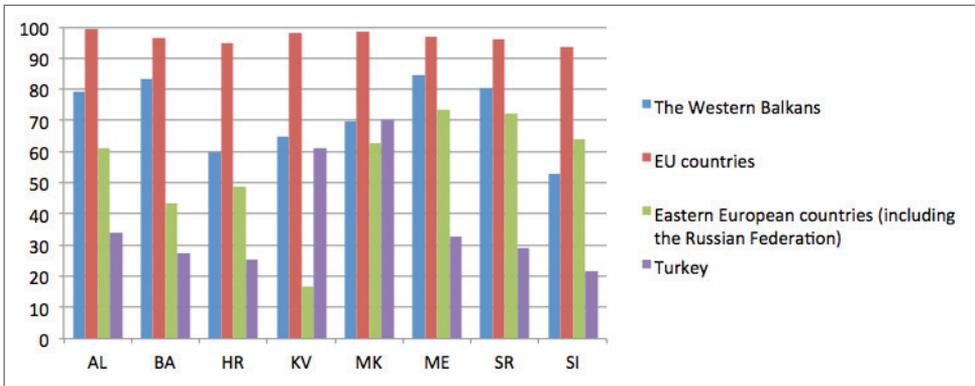
**Figure 13:** My institution should primarily seek cooperation with universities or higher education institutions from the *Western Balkans* – percentage of those agreeing or strongly agreeing, by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)



Second, we inquired *in which world regions or countries would academics prefer to establish or improve academic cooperation* in both teaching and research. Respondents were asked to rank individual options with choices comprising two sets of countries. The first set included European countries (i.e., the EHEA) classified into a few groups: the EU, the Western Balkans, non-EU Eastern Europe (including Russian Federation) and Turkey. Within the EHEA, a clear-cut preference was given to the *EU countries*. In all eight countries involved in our survey, more than 90% of all respondents designated the EU countries as those of a high or the highest priority for academic cooperation (the biggest share – 99.4% – of all respondents to mark these options was in Albania, and the lowest was in Slovenia at 93.6%). Academic partnerships with other *Western Balkan countries* also attracted a highly favourable vote, albeit not as favourable as for the EU countries. The range of those giving the Western Balkans a high or the highest priority was between the lowest 52.6% (Slovenia) and the highest 84.4% (Montenegro); other countries were in between with Croatia being closest to Slovenia.

Only in Slovenia did respondents (64%) express their preference for *Eastern European countries* over partnerships with *Western Balkan countries* (53%). The strongest preference for cooperation with the Eastern European region in general was also expressed by the Serbian (72.1%) and Montenegrin (73.5%) academics, albeit it was lower than the preference given to the Western Balkan region. By far the lowest preference for partnerships with Eastern Europe was expressed by the Kosovar academics (16.7%). *Turkey* on average attracted the lowest preference for intra-European cooperation (with the lowest preference given by Slovenian academics, i.e. 21.7%, and followed by 25.6% of Croatian academics, 27.5% of academics from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 29% of Serbian academics, 32.8% of Montenegrin and 34% of Albanian). However, academic cooperation with *Turkey* was seen as a relatively high priority by the Macedonian (70.2%) and Kosovar (61.1%) academics.

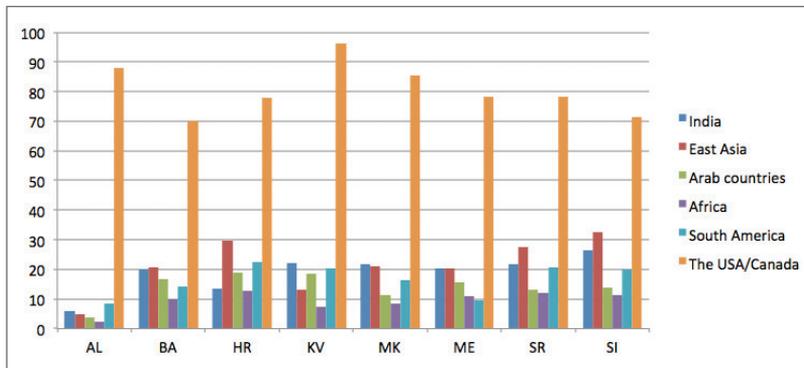
**Figure 14:** Percentage of respondents by countries giving a particular *European region or country* a high or the highest priority for academic cooperation (N=1,678; CEPS 2012)



When it comes to preferences for academic cooperation with other world regions, clearly the highest priority is given to the *North American region* (the USA and Canada). The share of those who see this region as being of a high or the highest priority ranges from 70% (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and 71.4% (Slovenia) to the highest 96.3% in Kosovo. For academics in several countries (Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Slovenia) the preference for cooperation with North America exceeds their preference for their second most preferred region in Europe. Other world regions and countries are to a much smaller extent preferred as destinations for building academic partnerships. The lowest score among all countries is given to *Africa* (the highest 12.7% in Bosnia and Herzegovina). *Arab countries* are also not a highly preferred partner region, but are on average more

preferred than Africa (the highest 19% in Croatia). *India and East Asia* are most often given high priority by Slovenian academics (26.5% and 32.7%) and the lowest in Albania. *South America* obtained the highest score from Croatian academics (22.6%) and the lowest again in Albania (8.5%).

**Figure 15:** Percentage of respondents by countries giving a particular *world region or country* a high or the highest priority for academic cooperation (N=1,678; CEPS 2012)



## Conclusion

When geographical preferences for international cooperation are examined, a relative neighbourhood, geographic and/or cultural closeness (e.g. language, religion etc.) and tradition of cooperation – not only educational but also political or economic – indeed typically prevail. Within the emerging EHEA, individual countries predominantly search for partners and establish relationships depending on their feeling of closeness and common tradition which they would like to preserve and enhance; other reasons come later and with less intensity.

The general underfunding of higher education and research in the region is reflected in only developing internationalisation practices and in the dependence on foreign support. At the institutional level, *capacity-building* prevails as the main aim of internationalisation; at the national level it is *policy transfer* (also see *Chapter 1*). The exporting of education as an internationalisation feature is rarely observed; the Faculty of Economics at the University of Ljubljana is an example with its educational provision in Kosovo and Macedonia. In recent years, internationalisation has often been on the national policy agendas; however, it is more a wish than a reality. The heavy structural reforms recommended by the Bologna Process or requested by international donors take up the lion's share of available resources.

## Chapter 9

### EQUITY AND EGALITARIAN VALUES – AN ISSUE IN THE SHADOW

Equity and egalitarian values are categories which can be referred to as classical in both higher education research and the broader sociology of education. To the surprise of the research team, the interviewees and questionnaire respondents were either uninterested or unwilling to discuss the matter when it was explicitly addressed in the questions. Often the issue was in the shadow of other concerns grounded in the specific context of the Western Balkans.

The following chapter attempts to shed light on the reasons for the *absence of equity and egalitarian values in the agendas, discourses and narratives* of the interviewees. It shows that there might be more regional idiosyncrasies in viewing the social world and higher education than the mainstream higher education research in the West of Europe would recognise. In order to understand the ideas, perceptions and attitudes regarding equity/equality in the context of higher education it was necessary to transcend the statements and accounts and contextualise the reasoning of the interviewees. The most overt aspects emerging from the analysis are presented below.

#### ‘Good and bad students’: Reliance on meritocratic selection

Our respondents chiefly favoured the selection of students based on their prior achievements and grades (meritocratic selection). Closely related to this, the concept of ‘good’ (the best) *students* and ‘bad’ *students* is very common across the region. It is believed that students are fully responsible for their performance and that, consequently, the academically less successful ones should not be let into the university. This hints at some sort of *meritocratic elitism*.

In Albania, the common practice of distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ students is perhaps the strongest in the region. The interviewees understood the Bologna structure as an opportunity to filter out the bad students in order to raise the quality of further levels of education.

*The Bologna Process has generally functioned well in the sense that it has made the distinction between good students and not good students, you know, especially passing from the bachelor level to the master level. So this system allows this possibility, but anyway this has not always functioned properly in making this distinction between those who are more able and those who are less able. [...] We are making some efforts to make the bachelor degree a little less difficult or more appropriate for that level of studies, whereas there are some professors who keep a certain high level of study or knowledge or academic teaching at this level [bachelor], which in fact should be for the master's level (Interview 51; 12/03/2012).*

*There was a failure of the Bologna Process in Albania. I was always under pressure from the top organisations, from the government, from the Rectorate to allow students to go on into further education. [...] I didn't want to allow those who got less than seven to go on [to master studies]. On the contrary, they [students] went on strike and they won all the battles with the government. [...] Now they are all entering master's (Interview 48; 13/03/2012).*

New master-level study programmes are characterised by the binary divide into *professional* and *research* oriented master programmes. As explained by some interviewees, the professional masters are undertaken by less successful students, whereas the research master is reserved for students with good grades (a sort of merit-based elite). Mediocrity was described as some sort of disease of Albanian society and as an obstacle to the goal of *excellence*.

The belief that it is mostly up to the individual student how successful they are in their studies is also visible in the *funding mechanisms*. In some cases (notably Serbia and Croatia), the funding system includes the categories of budget and non-budget students (also see *Chapter 6*). The first category represents a quota for the best achievers and implies tuition-free study, whereas the less successful high school leavers have to pay a tuition fee if they wish to enrol in university. One of the side-effects of such a policy is the excessive enrolment of paying students in order to consolidate the institutional budgets (e.g. in Montenegro).

Even though the hidden social selection and reproduction of social classes through meritocratic selection mechanisms is a well-known phenomenon in the sociology scholarship, this issue does not figure as relevant in the discourses in the Western Balkans. The concern for equity and equality has given way to other values and issues. It was absent in the

collected accounts (particularly among the senior academic staff) regardless of the country or institution.

### Quality and excellence vs. access and emancipation

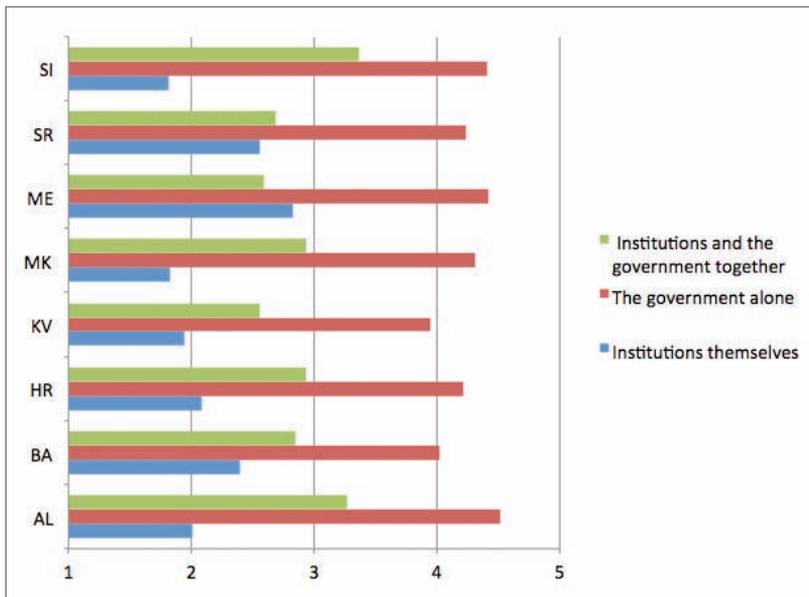
The ‘good’ and ‘bad’ student conceptualisation also results in a tension between the government and the university whereby the government asks the university and its faculties to enrol ever more students, while the faculties claim they are enrolling far beyond their capacity. In Kosovo, the field research revealed an outspoken cleavage between the public university and the government on this matter. The interviewees complained about the bad quality of the studies stemming mainly from the problem of the enrolment of less successful and poorly motivated students. In the context of the curtailed institutional autonomy, one interviewee referred to government interference in setting the enrolment numbers: “*we proposed 30 places for the first-year enrolment but the government made us extend the number to 200*” (interview 57; 21/03/2012).

The senior academic staff of public universities in Slovenia claim the *right to select students*. They interpret this as an integral part of university autonomy as opposed to the currently practiced state regulated selection (based on a final examination and high school achievements). Even though the results of the quantitative analysis across the region (see *Figure 16*) suggest that the academic staff predominantly trust the government when it comes to selection at the gates of higher education (red column), a significant share of respondents indicated a preference for sharing the responsibility between the state and universities (green columns) or even left the exclusive right to select students up to the latter (blue columns). When adding these two values, the sum exceeds the value that the respondents give to the government. This trend deserves attention because the state system has played an exclusive role in regulating the basic access criteria for universities in the examined countries.

The concern for wide access to higher education is more present in the governments’ discourses and policies (e.g. in Macedonia and Kosovo) where higher education is perceived to play a significant role in the reconstruction of a post-conflict society and in the emancipation of remote rural areas. Especially in the economically deprived areas of the Western Balkans, education occupies a high position in the normative and value scale of society. A higher educational qualification symbolises the path to a higher social and economic status and therefore interest in studying is high. The political reasoning of the government is well captured in the following statement:

*The Ministry is using an inclusive approach. We cannot limit the possibilities of young people, to all of those who want to study, because the right to study is granted by law. And we cannot say that you have no right to study. As the state, we have obligations to enable them, to give them access to education (Interview 61; 21/03/2012).*

**Figure 16:** The opinion of academic staff (5: strongly agree; 1: strongly disagree) on who should set the criteria for the admission of students to higher education institutions, by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)



### Egalitarian values subdued to quality and excellence – the role of prestigious institutions

Concerning the question of whether there are downsides to entrance selections, the interviewees also referred to the issue of equity/equality, showing an awareness of the implications that this form of selection might hold for this issue:

*Rural regions have a lower level of knowledge, even if they have the same programmes – but the quality of the students is lower. It maybe seems to be an injustice for such categories of students, but we are working on quality (Interview 58; 23/03/2012).*

Thus, some interviewees were aware of the exclusion caused by entrance exams, but subdued equality/equity to quality as a superior goal. The

reference to *excellence* appeared frequently, especially in the arguments of academics and policy makers from Kosovo and Albania.

Particularly in Kosovo, the meritocratic exclusion was connected to the state- and nation-building process. There is an overwhelming presence of the idea that a newborn country needs an educated elite in order to lead the progress and develop the institutions. The university is perceived as a generator of the nation's elite. This project is ranked superiorly to safeguarding egalitarian values – “*there is elitism but we get high quality in return*” (interview 63; 21/03/2012). This is visible in the role of the expensive and highly reputable private (trans-national) institutions in Kosovo. One example is the American University of Kosovo (AUK) – a private institution run under a contract with the Rochester Institute of Technology from the USA. According to the interviewees and informants, graduates from this university (unlike the other private institutions) easily find employment after graduation and stand a good chance of vertical progression in society. The entrance filter is primarily represented by the relatively high tuition fee (during the field research it was not possible to ascertain the sum, but the interlocutors whose children study there reported a tuition fee of several thousand euros). Hence the likelihood of access is highly contingent upon one's economic background. One interviewee was very outspoken on this matter. He viewed the tuition fee as an element distinguishing the AUK from the other mediocre universities in the country:

*Usually in every country we have the richest people, that's it. The richest people go to the best institutions to study [...]. Like in your country [referring to the interviewer's homeland] (Interview 63; 21/03/2012).*

### Other region-specific rationales behind the belief in meritocracy

The recourse to meritocratic principles can be explained by another regional idiosyncrasy: The perceived elevated levels of *corruption* and *nepotism*. Often (outstandingly in Macedonia and Albania) it is believed that these illnesses of society can be fought against by relying on merits which is reflected in an uncritical belief in meritocracy, including in admission to higher education:

*Those who run our society are there due to criteria other than merits. People do not grow on the basis of merits but according to the rules of nepotism, acquaintances and corruption (Interview 48; 13/03/2012).*

Another considerable factor contributing to the relative absence of concerns about equality/equity is the *heritage of a socialist past*. The assumption that society is homogeneous in terms of wealth and access to the public good was long the predominant belief and is therefore still deeply embedded in the system of norms of the societies. In some cases for example, the respondents reacted with surprise to or were unprepared for the question on access and equality/equity, replying that this is not a problem in their country. This makes the issue of equality/equity slide off the priority list on the policy and political agendas.

## Conclusions

Equity and egalitarian values do not figure among the most salient issues in the narratives and discourses of the academics, policy makers and civil servants in higher education across the region of the Western Balkans. This chapter reveals that the social and political contexts in the region bring forward concerns and problems which view higher education as primarily the institution supporting economic recovery and building the nation or state. Especially in the post-conflict settings, the analysis indicated a tension between partly incompatible ideas on the policy priorities: (1) the *open-door enrolment policies* for widening access to the less privileged social groups; (2) the need to *develop an intellectual elite and educated labour for state- and economy-building*; and (3) the endeavour to *enhance the quality and reputation* of the universities.

With a few exceptions, there is no particular concern about the influence of the social/cultural background on the educational performance of a young individual. Success in high school and achievements during studies are predominantly attributed to the abilities and efforts of the students themselves. The meritocratic principle is also present in the funding mechanisms where good students are exempt from paying tuition fees. In some cases the exclusive universities are seen as a necessary mechanism to build up the intellectual and economic elite of the nation and therefore accept the idea of relatively high tuition fees and limited access to certain institutions. In general, the governments are the most sensitive to the issue of equality/equity. In a few cases they tend to favour greater access and thereby contradict the academics who view the selection of students as the path to better education and excellence.

## Chapter 10

### ROLE OF STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY MAKING

Student involvement in university governance is considered one of the foundational values of European higher education. It relates to the participatory democratic model of university governance and to students as key stakeholders in higher education. This chapter discusses the role students have in decision making in two contexts: in national-level policy making, especially within National Higher Education Councils and Quality Assurance Agencies, and within the governance of universities and other higher education institutions. The investigation is guided by the observation that legal provisions and practices of student involvement in these two contexts vary greatly across European countries. The key distinction lies in the extent to which student involvement is formally secured through national legislation or dependant on decisions made by individual institutions or governments. The other distinction is in the capacity – and also legitimacy – of the representative student bodies to effectively assume a representative role.

Our research focused on two sets of questions. First, how is student participation regulated in national legislation of the Western Balkan countries? Which aspects of student participation are emphasised and which are absent? How did national legislation change in the period from 2002 to 2012? Second, does national legislation reflect the European recommendations on student participation? In other words, to what extent can we speak about Europeanisation in the sense of policy adaptation and institutional change in this area?

#### Student involvement in national higher education governance

Since 2002 serious changes have been made in national legislation concerning student participation in national-level higher education governance. In half of the examined countries, students were included in the *National Higher Education Councils*. By comparison, a survey of government officials conducted by the Council of Europe in 2002<sup>10</sup> shows that at that

10 See <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/resources/The%20university%20as%20Res%20Publica.pdf>

time none of the countries had legal provisions for student representation in the Councils. This change can largely be attributed to the Bologna recommendations, in which European Ministers express that they *fully support staff and student participation in decision making structures at European, national and institutional levels* (Prague Communiqué 2001).<sup>11</sup> Our respondents for the interviews attested that these recommendations resonated in discussions concerning legislative changes. For example, in the case of Slovenia:

*Under the influence of [the] Bologna [Process] students gained more slots in decision-making bodies. [...] The Bologna Process led to the mandatory representation of students* (Interview 43; 16/02/2012).

At present, four countries have formal provisions for student representatives in the National Higher Education Council: Slovenia, Macedonia (not yet implemented), Serbia (as observers with voting rights only on issues concerning quality assurance) and Montenegro. In addition, in Macedonia students are represented in the Inter-University Conference and in Slovenia in the Council of Student Affairs (with 9 out of 17 members) which is a consultative governmental body with a specific focus on student-related issues.

Much more consistent across the countries has been *student involvement in external quality assurance bodies and procedures*. The legislative changes in this area were part of the wave of national reforms of quality assurance systems which swept through the region after the release of European Standards and Guidelines.<sup>12</sup> The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance adopted in 2005 within the Bologna Process basically made student participation in external and internal quality assurance procedures mandatory. Generally, in all the examined countries – with the exception of the Quality Assurance Agency in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation) – these guidelines have been implemented in a way that has assured student involvement in the governing structures of the external agency or other forms of external quality assurance structure (see *Table 3*). In Montenegro and Serbia, the inclusion of students in the National Higher Education Council has been motivated by governments' aspirations to implement the European Standards and Guidelines since the National Council performs the role of an external quality assurance body. The Bologna Process *Implementation Report* (2010)<sup>13</sup> states that

11 See <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=80>

12 See [http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

13 See [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/\(1\)/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf)

only in Croatia do students participate at all five levels of possible involvement in external quality assurance procedures, and in Montenegro at four levels.

**Table 3:** Student involvement in external quality assurance

Country	Student involvement in governance structures of national QAA	As full members or observers in external review teams	In the preparation of self-evaluation reports	In decision-making process for external reviews	In follow-up procedures
AL	Yes, in Accreditation Council of QAA, 1/11	No	Yes	No	Yes
BA	Yes, but only in the Republic of Srpska, 1/5	Yes	Yes	No	No
HR	Yes, in Governing Board of QAA, 1/9	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MK	Yes, in Board for Accreditation and Evaluation, 2/23	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
ME	Yes, in National HE Council which is responsible for external QA, 2/13	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
SR	Yes, in National HE Council and in Accreditation Sub-Commissions, 2/21+ in Council; 2/5 in Sub-Commissions	Yes	Yes	No	No
SI	Yes, in Governing Board of QAA, 2/11	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

(Source: Compiled from the Bologna Follow-Up Group National Reports and from legislation)

The bodies of national legislation also stipulate two *other national bodies in which students participate*. In Macedonia, presidents of the Student Parliaments at universities are involved in the Inter-University Conference which acts as a public legal entity and serves the purposes of reviewing and aligning issues of common interest. In Slovenia, students are represented (as a majority) in the Council for Student Affairs, which is professional and advisory body to the government concerning student questions, especially concerning student welfare and the social status of students.

### Student involvement in university governance

In all countries examined, national higher education laws entail provisions stipulating *student involvement in the governance of universities*

(and other higher education institutions). These provisions also refer to the existence of student representative bodies in the form of: student councils (Slovenia, Croatia, Albania), student parliaments (Macedonia, Montenegro), student conferences (Serbia) or use a generic term 'student representative body' (Bosnia and Herzegovina). In formal terms, in all countries students are represented in academic senates holding between 10% and 20% of the seats (see *Table 4*). Only in Montenegro is the share of student members in academic senates not specified in national legislation; although the statute of the University of Montenegro stipulates 15% of seats. Compared to the Council of Europe's 2002 survey,<sup>14</sup> our findings show that the percentage of students in university bodies has increased in several countries. In most countries, the arrangements for student representation in executive boards are decided within institutions and, where that practice exists, the students' share is small.

**Table 4:** Student participation in institutional governance and elections of rectors

Country	Academic Senate	Executive Board	Faculty Councils	Elections of Rector	Other
AL	15%	1 student in Council of Administration	15%	20%	
BA	15%	No provision in Framework Law, but included in some Canton laws in Federation and in the law of the Republic of Srpska (1/7-11)	No provision	No provision	
HR	10% (15% in Draft Law)	No provision	15%	No provision	
MK	10%	1/11+ in University Council	No provision	No provision	Student Ombudsman
ME	Yes, but % not specified	Yes, but % not specified	Yes, but % not specified	No provision	
SR	20%	Yes, students and founders: an equal number up to the full assembly (1/3 of all and each ½)	20%	No provision	Student Vice-Rector; Student Vice-Dean
SI	20%	Yes, but % not specified	20%	20%	

(Source: Compiled from national legislation)

The pre-Bologna national legislation in the Western Balkans typically made a reference to *student involvement in internal (institutional) quality assurance systems*. This practice has been formalised and strengthened with the Bologna reforms following the European Standards and

14 See <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/resources/The%20university%20as%20Res%20Publica.pdf>

Guidelines. In all examined countries, internal institutional regulations and strategies on quality assurance have been developed, and these – as a rule – include provisions on student involvement (see *Table 5*). Student representatives act in these procedures as consultants providing expert advice.

**Table 5:** Student involvement in institutional quality assurance bodies and procedures

	AL	BA	HR	MK	ME	SR	SI
Are there formal requirements for students to be involved in internal quality assurance systems?	Yes						
Is there a requirement for students to be involved in the preparation of self-evaluation reports?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is there a requirement for students to be involved in decision making as an outcome of evaluation?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

(Source: Compiled from Bologna Follow-Up Group National Reports 2010/2011)

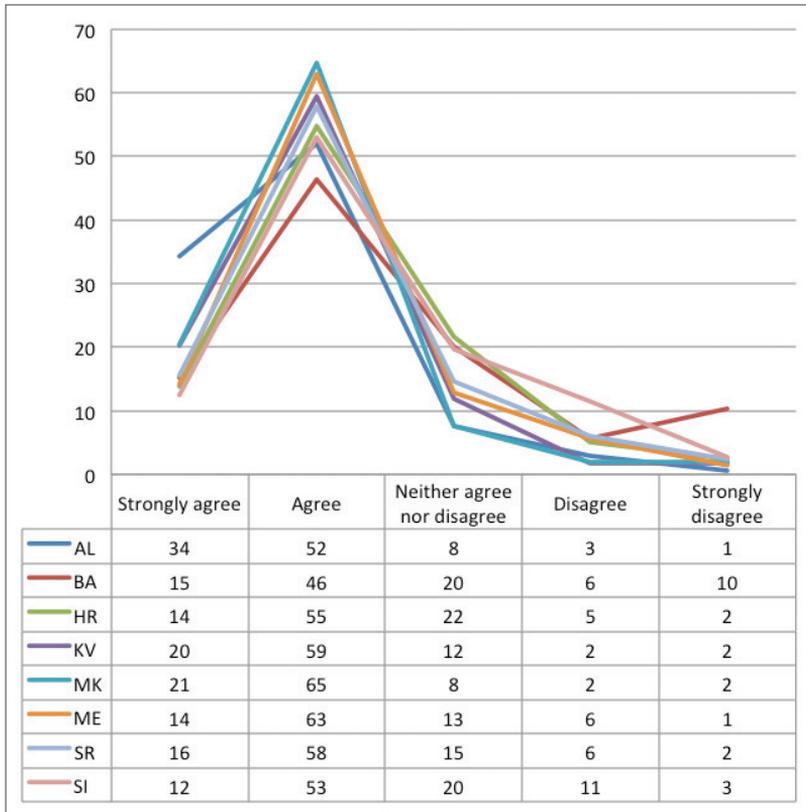
### Democratisation of the university and the acceptance of students in the governance structures

In the Western Balkans, the ‘university democratising’ moment has been on the rise in the first decade after 2000. Empowered by developments in the Bologna Process, students have taken the opportunity to assert their voice, especially in university governance. Student participation appears to also be promulgated through academic culture and favourable academics’ attitudes. In the survey questionnaire we asked academics to express their opinion on the following statement: *Students should be part of decision structures in my institution* (see *Figure 17*). The results show a relatively favourable attitude by the academics across the countries; with the highest number of those in agreement coming from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia (over 80% in each) and the highest numbers of those disagreeing from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia (around 20% in each).

Although formal provisions for student participation are in place and academics appear to be supportive of student involvement, students’ actual influence on decisions appears to be limited. In the survey questionnaire, we asked academics how much they believed students have had an actual influence on key institutional decisions: *At my institution no major decision*

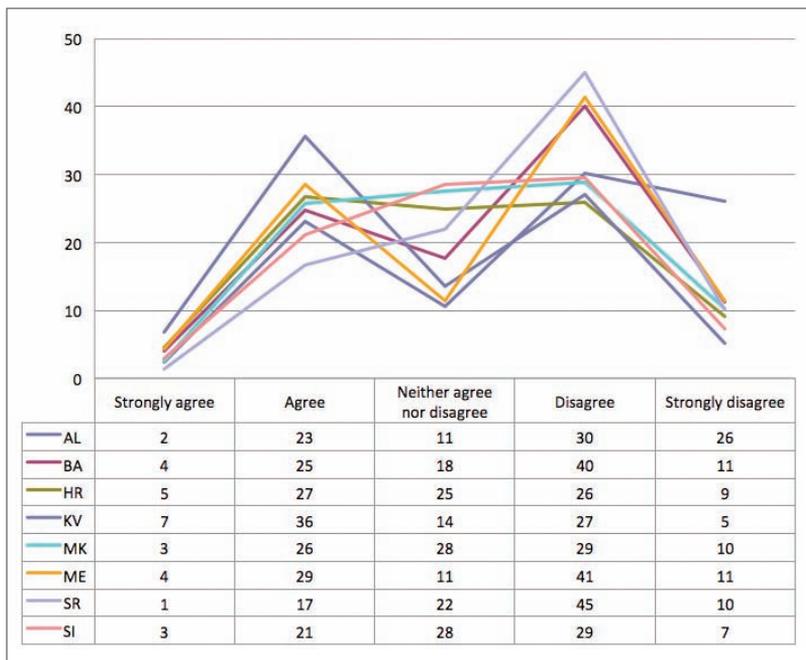
is passed without the agreement of students/student representatives. In half of the countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia), over 50% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. Only in Kosovo did over 40% of respondents believe that students have an influence on key decisions made within higher education institutions.

**Figure 17:** Students should be members of the decision-making structures at my institution – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)



The interviews confirm this view and offer two sets of explanations as to why students do not in fact have a greater influence. A lack of interest in student representation is one reason. The other reason stated is the poor organisation of representative student bodies or the lack of legitimacy of student bodies. Finally, several institutional leaders interviewed explained that student involvement needs to be curbed or carefully managed since students lack knowledge and experience for offering quality inputs to decision processes, and are only concerned about issues to their direct benefit and not about university matters in general.

**Figure 18:** At my institution no major decision is passed without the agreement of students/student representatives – percentage of respondents’ average grading by countries (N= 1,742; CEPS 2012)



*I am not satisfied with the level of their [i.e. student union] participation. This is not only their [i.e. student] fault. Perhaps it is also our fault because we do not find the ways to motivate them. We want to adopt a new regulation on student union. We are trying to learn how this issue is regulated in other countries. We encourage student representatives to go to other student unions abroad to see how they work and we would pay for their expenses. But it is difficult to find students to do this. [...]* (Interview 01; 08/02/2012).

*Now, there are also changes in the law regarding this issue [i.e., student organising]: a shift from the ‘presidential system’ of the student union to the ‘student parliament’. I hope this will bring more responsibility of the student leaders towards students. On the other hand, our students are represented in the university bodies. They are integrated structurally, but not in quality [of decision taking etc.]* (Interview 01; 08/02/2012).

*Students ask for an increasing number of examinations, less credit to pass from one class to another, their practical profit as students. They are not concerned about a general increase in knowledge or the level of*

*the transfer of knowledge or how prepared teachers are. They care only about the minimum time they need to spend in the classroom, how to get from the classroom to the market faster, and how to profit more from the degree (Interview 48; 13/03/2012).*

*Students are not widely involved in decisions. There is a problem because students lack a proper functional organisation. They are passive [in terms of getting organised]. There is a representative of students in the Faculty Council, but that is all (Interview 51; 12/03/2012).*

*I do not expect that students who have just come to university for the first time to know the experiences of universities' curricula at home and abroad more than those that are concerned with this all day long. I do not think that the university's political process should be based on principles of participatory democracy and voting by majority (Interview 49; 16/03/2012).*

### Conclusion

This chapter argues that the positive changes in national legal provisions concerning student involvement in higher education governance in the Western Balkans can largely be attributed to the Europeanisation effects of the Bologna recommendations. The political endorsement of student participation on all levels of higher education governance (departmental, institutional, and national) in the Bologna Process has been used by national student representative organisations as a leverage to consolidate or strengthen their participation in the national and institutional higher education governance structures. The effects vary, however, across countries. The academics generally accept the idea of student involvement in the university governing structures. Yet on the national level the willingness to democratise policy making is considerably weaker. There is a stronger argument for involving students where they can contribute to the efficiency of decision making and/or implementation of policy decisions. Quality assurance is certainly one of these areas, while the other is student services.

## Annex

### ON GATHERING STATISTICAL DATA IN THE REGION

The gathering of the statistical data included several levels of research. One part was desk research which encompassed the aggregation of already existing statistical data from the national statistical agencies from all eight countries of the region. Five years were selected as relevant benchmarks for the data variation analysis in periods of five-year intervals (1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010). This annex presents some basic information about the national statistical offices in view of the statistical data on higher education that were collected. The introductory part for each national statistical agency is a transcription from their own official webpage. This is followed by a few remarks based on personal experiences concerning the access to and availability of data on higher education in the region.

#### Albania

The statistical service in the Republic of Albania<sup>15</sup> is realised by the Institute of Statistics (*Instituti i Statistikave* – INSTAT)<sup>16</sup> in cooperation with ministries, statistics departments, civil offices and other subjects. As stated on the official website, INSTAT's mission is to provide transparent, neutral and timely statistics that help users assess the development of transformation processes in the country.

The Statistics Database has its own search engine which helps users find all the datasets containing keyword(s) in the heading or description of the dataset. Statistics for higher education includes data for: students enrolled in tertiary education by university, gender, type and year from 1995 till 2010, and students enrolled by faculty in public education by system type, gender, university and faculty, type and year for 2010.

Other documents on the official website can be found in the thematic field *Education* and are released in the form of tables in the folder *Figures*: students enrolled by faculty, year 2009/10, in public education; students enrolled in tertiary education (1994/95 till 2009/10); students by speciality who graduated in Albania from 1997 till 2009. A Statistical Yearbook

15 <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/home.aspx>

16 <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/Home.aspx>

could not be found on the official website and the only alternative was the publication *Albania in Figures, 2010*.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

There are three statistical institutes within Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the Law on Statistics, the competent authorities for organising, producing and disseminating statistics are: the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>17</sup> (*Agencija za statistiku BiH*) at the level of the state (BHAS), the Federal Office of Statistics for the Entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>18</sup> (FZS) and the Republic of Srpska's Institute of Statistics for the Entity of the Republic of Srpska<sup>19</sup> (RZSRS).

The earliest educational statistical data accessible on the national statistical website are those for the 1999/2000 school year (published in First Release, No. 1, Vol. 1, Sarajevo 2005).<sup>20</sup> These are quite limited in length (3 pages) and contain no methodology or definitions.

*DevInfo BIH* as a Statistical Database for Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>21</sup> provides useful educational statistical data like the number of enrolled/graduated students, number of teaching academic staff, and number of graduate and PhD students. The only drawback is the limited time period. Statistical data are only available for the years 2009 and 2010. The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>22</sup> performs its work in the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina by issuing regulations and recommendations for the field of higher education, particularly in establishing new and developing existing higher education institutions, and leading the process of external quality assurance. Besides information about the Bologna Process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Agency's documents, laws and internal legal acts, there is an information sheet of licensed public and private higher education institutions<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, the statistics on higher education are flawed.

.....  
17 <http://www.bhas.ba/>

18 <http://www.fzs.ba/>

19 <http://www.rzs.rs.ba/>

20 [http://www.bhas.ba/saopstenja/obrazov\\_2001\\_2004.pdf](http://www.bhas.ba/saopstenja/obrazov_2001_2004.pdf)

21 <http://dissemination.bhas.ba/di/>

22 [http://hea.gov.ba/Home.aspx?template\\_id=51&pageIndex=1](http://hea.gov.ba/Home.aspx?template_id=51&pageIndex=1)

23 [http://www.hea.gov.ba/kvalitet/evencija\\_vsu/Lista.aspx](http://www.hea.gov.ba/kvalitet/evencija_vsu/Lista.aspx)

## Croatia

The Croatian Bureau of Statistics (*Državni zavod za statistiku* – CBS) is a state administrative organisation, a central authority, and it is the principal producer, disseminator and coordinator of the official statistics system of the Republic of Croatia situated in Zagreb. It is available as an on-line service on the website<sup>24</sup> in the Croatian and English languages. Most of the required data about national higher education statistics like enrolment and graduation were presented in the annual edition of the Statistical Yearbook. This was therefore our main source for collecting data.

Statistical Yearbooks in electronic form are only available from 2006 and later presented in *html* or *PDF* version. Statistical Yearbooks for 2003, 2004 and 2005 are listed as available but only as a table of contents (without including any working links). This means that the earlier versions (1990–2005) were not available on the official website but exclusively in the Bureau's library in Zagreb. Another option for gathering statistical data involves the Statistical Databases on the CBS website arranged in *PC-Axis Databases* form. Unfortunately, education statistics are not included.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education<sup>25</sup> (*Agencija za znanost i visoko obrazovanje*) is another important place for data gathering. It was modelled following the European practices concerning quality assurance in science and higher education. The Agency performs part of the procedure of initial accreditation, procedures of re-accreditation, thematic evaluation and audit, collects and processes data on Croatian higher education, science and related systems.

Statistical data for the number of university components could be found on the official web page,<sup>26</sup> and other statistical data like types of higher education institutions in Croatia; number of study programmes at various types of higher education institutions, number of accredited study programmes in the Republic of Croatia 2005–2010 are presented on the official website in the folder STATISTICS.<sup>27</sup>

While compiling the sheet with basic data on student enrolments and on academics, a few discrepancies were found in the statistical data:

- The number of enrolled students in public and private higher education institutions in 2009/10, 2010/11 does not match the

.....  
24 [http://www.dzs.hr/default\\_e.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm)

25 <http://www.azvo.hr/index.php/hr/>

26 <http://www.azvo.hr/index.php/en/statistike/sastavnice-javnih-sveucilista>

27 <http://www.azvo.hr/index.php/en/statistike>

data from EUROSTAT and the Agency for Science and Higher Education;

- The number of enrolled and graduated students in 1995 varies from other documents received from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (graduate students in 1995 by age and gender; graduate students in 1995 by ISCED level and field of study; students by ISCED level and field of study in winter term 1995/96; students by type of schools, year of study, age and gender in winter term 1995/96);
- The number of graduated students in 2000 does not match the data from another document received from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics; (graduate students in 2000 by field of study, ISCED level; graduate students by type of higher education institutions, field of science and by way of study in 1996/2000).

### Kosovo

The Kosovo Agency of Statistics<sup>28</sup> (*Agjencia e statistikavetë Kosovës*) is a professional institution which deals with the collection, processing and publication of official statistical data. The Kosovo Agency of Statistics almost completely covers the territory of Kosovo, based on the statistical structure of the listed areas as the basic unit and sole in the country from which it gets first-hand information.

Statistical data in the field of higher education are presented on the official website (under the part *Publication*) and according to the selected language (Albanian, Serbian, English); the availability of documents in different languages varies. It has to be noted that not all documents are translated into English and, for instance, *Statistics on Education in Kosovo 2007/08, 2011/12* are only available in the Albanian language. The official website publishes statistical information from 2000 to 2010. Data about graduate students are inconsistent in the sense that from the 2008/09 academic year there is no evidence in the education statistics concerning students who graduated, besides master's students who graduated in 2009.

Statistical data for graduate students and master's in December 2010 were not accessible, even though it is stated in *Educational Statistics 2009/10* that the data would be available from the University of Pristina (Central Administration), including other data for the 2009/2010 academic year (graduate students under the old programme; graduate students under

.....  
28 <http://esk.rks-gov.net/ENG/home>

the Bologna Declaration; master's students at the University of Pristina; graduate students in master's studies). Also, in the document entitled *Education Statistics for 2010/11* data for graduate students are not presented.

### Macedonia

The State Statistical Office<sup>29</sup> (*Državen Zavod za Statistika*) is a specialised and independent organisation within the state administration of the Republic of Macedonia. The basic functions of the institution are collecting, processing and disseminating statistical data about the demographic, social and economic situation of Macedonia.

A digital database called *MAK stat* could be found on the official statistic website<sup>30</sup> in PC-AXIS files form. Statistical data on *MAK stat* include enrolled students in undergraduate studies by the place of their permanent residence, gender and region for the academic years 2000–2010 as well as graduated students by their place of permanent residence, gender and region for the academic years 2000–2011.

Another source of information is presented in the *Publication* cluster where we can find the document *Enrolled Students in School Year 2008/09* which contains data from 1948/49 till 2008/08 about students enrolled in vocational education, university education and the number of teachers. Similarly, the document *Graduated students* published in 2008 includes data from 1958 till 2008 about students graduating from higher education, university education, number of Doctors of Science, Masters of Science and Specialists. Recent similar publications are also available with the latest data.

### Montenegro

The Statistical Office of Montenegro<sup>31</sup> (*Zavod za statistiku Crne Gore – “MONSTAT”*) is a regular body for the production of official statistics.

The Statistical Yearbook, a most comprehensive statistical publication, is presented on the official statistical website of Montenegro covering the period from 2006 to 2012. Older publications were not accessible electronically. Besides the Statistical Yearbook, data on higher education are available in a table (*Excel*) format containing enrolment and graduation data for graduate, postgraduate and PhD students. Enrolment is systematically

29 <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Default.aspx>

30 <http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/pxweb2007bazi/dialog/statfile1.asp>

31 <http://monstat.org/eng/index.php>

presented from the 2002/03 academic year till 2011/12 for graduate students and from 2007/08 till 2010/11 for postgraduate students. Students who have finished basic studies and those who have earned a Master, Specialist or PhD degree are followed from 2000 till 2011.

### Serbia

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia<sup>32</sup> (*Republički zavod za statistiku Republika Srbija*) comprises 14 regional departments that were established in order to provide the improved organisation of collecting statistical survey data in the field.

Statistical data on higher education are accessible from the Statistical Yearbook for 2012, 2011 and 2010 (published and accessible on the official website) and from the electronic database which is also released on the official website for the period from 2007 till 2010.<sup>33</sup> Other statistical data on the website could be found in the Archive. The earliest data for pre- and primary school are accessible for the 1992/93 school year. For higher education, data published in 2008 include data for the years 2001 till 2005. What should be emphasised is that since 1998 (2001 in some documents) Kosovo and Metohia data are excluded from statistical data for higher education in Serbia. A list of higher education institutions (both public and private) can be found on the official webpage of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>34</sup>

### Slovenia

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia<sup>35</sup> (*Statistični urad Republike Slovenije – SURS*) is the main coordinator of statistical surveys in Slovenia. Data are arranged by 4 major fields of statistics including 29 subject areas and 2 general areas. The same organisation of data is applied in the *SI-STAT Data Portal*. It provides access to statistical data from various sources in the one place, including links to European statistical data collected by EUROSTAT from national statistical offices of the member states of the European Union and candidate countries. The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (*Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije za kakovost v visokem šolstvu – NAKVIS*)

.....  
32 <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Default.aspx>

33 <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/public/ReportView.aspx>

34 <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/sajt/ustanove-visoke.php?page=112>

35 <http://www.stat.si/index.asp>

provides for the development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. Its official website<sup>36</sup> provides information about accreditation and evaluation, experts, legislation and the rules of the agency. A list of higher education institutions (public and private) in the Republic of Slovenia is placed on the official website of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.<sup>37</sup>

What should be emphasised is that since the 1997/98 academic year candidates for graduation who have a student status (so-called *absolvents*; they have finished their study programme and have the right to keep their student status for another year to graduate, including all student social rights) are included in the total number of students. Data include undergraduate students in professional higher and university study programmes as well as graduate (master's, specialist and doctoral) students. These data are available in the Statistical Yearbook from 2007 onwards. Until the 2003/04 academic year the data on student enrolments do not include students enrolled in doctoral studies. For the year 1995 candidates for graduation are not included in the total number of students. EUROSTAT statistics about enrolled students in public and private institutions, i.e., students by ISCED level, type of institution (private or public) and study intensity (full-time, part-time) are partly contradictory (i.e., showing inconsistent data for Slovenia for the period 1998 till 2003: more students enrolled in private institutions than public ones).

To summarise this short overview of the national statistical agencies in the region, the following table (*Table 6*) outlines basic information for each individual country, its national statistical agency, official website and their specific features. The table contains information about the national statistical offices, including:

- selective language options;
- a Data Request Form which facilitates the data request process; and
- database statistics with a selective search and data generating engine.

36 <http://test.nakvis.si/sl-SI/Content/Details/1>

37 <http://www.arhiv.mvzt.gov.si/en/>

**Table 6:** National statistical services in the Western Balkan region

Country	National Statistical Service	Languages	Data Request Form	Database Statistics including Educational Statistical Data
AL	Institute of Statistics	Albanian, English	No	YES – Statistical Databases <sup>i</sup>
BA	The Agency for Statistics	Bosnian, Serbian (Cyrillic), Croatian, English	No	YES – DevInfoBIH <sup>ii</sup>
HR	Croatian Bureau of Statistic	Croatian, English	Yes	NO
KV	Statistical Office of Kosovo	Albanian, Serbian, English	No	NO
MK	State Statistical Office	Macedonian (Cyrillic), English	Yes	YES – MAKStat Database <sup>iii</sup>
ME	Statistical Office of the Republic of Montenegro	Montenegrin, English	No	NO
SR	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia	Serbian (Cyrillic), Serbian (Latinica), English	Yes	YES – Dissemination database <sup>iv</sup>
SI	Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia	Slovenian, English	Yes	YES – SISTAT <sup>v</sup>

## Notes:

i Statistical Databases: <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/figures/statistical-databases.aspx>

ii DevInfoBIH: <http://dissemination.bhas.ba/di/>

iii MAKStat Database: <http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/pxweb2007bazi/Database/Statisticsysubject/databasetree.asp>

iv Dissemination database: <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/public/ReportView.aspx>

v SISTAT: [http://pxweb.stat.si/pxweb/Database/Dem\\_soc/Dem\\_soc.asp](http://pxweb.stat.si/pxweb/Database/Dem_soc/Dem_soc.asp)

## LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND QUOTATIONS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

A. Figures	Page
<b>Figure 1:</b> Students (in thousands) enrolled in higher education institutions, 1990/91 – 2010/11, by countries (Source: Compiled from national statistical offices)	14
<b>Figure 2:</b> The Bologna Process has contributed importantly to the quality of my institution – percentage of undecided respondents ( <i>neither – nor; no opinion</i> ) by countries and institutions (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)	26
<b>Figure 3:</b> The Bologna Process has contributed importantly to the quality of my institution – average rating by decided respondents (from +2: <i>strongly agree</i> to –2: <i>strongly disagree</i> ) by countries and institutions (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)	27
<b>Figure 4:</b> My institution <i>currently gives</i> vs. <i>should give</i> the following importance (5: <i>high priority</i> ; 1: <i>no priority</i> ) to the issue of specialising in a few fields/disciplines; by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012)	36
<b>Figure 5:</b> The university leadership, not the faculty leadership, should take most of the decisions and responsibility regarding financing and strategic priorities – distribution of responses (in absolute numbers) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)	41
<b>Figure 6:</b> Collegial governance is inefficient. Key decision-making competencies should be passed from academics to a professional director (or manager) and management structure – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)	42
<b>Figure 7:</b> The following stakeholders should be members of the decision-making structures at my institution – average grading (1: <i>strongly agree</i> , 5: <i>strongly disagree</i> ) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)	43
<b>Figure 8:</b> An external body (a council for higher education or an agency for quality assurance) should evaluate and accredit university study programmes – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012)	44

- Figure 9:** Students in public higher education institutions – percentage by countries (Source: Compiled from national statistical offices) 47
- Figure 10:** The *current* focus of higher education institutions as perceived by respondents (5: *very important*; 1: *not important*) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012) 56
- Figure 11:** The *desired* focus of higher education institutions as perceived by respondents (5: *very important*; 1: *not important*) by countries (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012) 57
- Figure 12:** Participants' perceptions (5: *very important*; 1: *not important*) by countries: the difference between the *desired* and *current* priorities of their higher education institutions (N=1,678; CEPS, 2012) 59
- Figure 13:** My institution should primarily seek cooperation with universities or higher education institutions from the *Western Balkans* – percentage of those who agree or strongly agree, by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012) 64
- Figure 14:** Percentage of respondents by countries that have given a particular *European region or country* a high or the highest priority for academic cooperation (N=1,678; CEPS 2012) 65
- Figure 15:** Percentage of respondents by countries that have given a particular *world region or country* a high or the highest priority for academic cooperation (N=1,678; CEPS 2012) 66
- Figure 16:** The opinion of academic staff (5: *strongly agree*; 1: *strongly disagree*) on who should set the criteria for the admission of students to higher education institutions, by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012) 70
- Figure 17:** Students should be members of the decision-making structures at my institution – percentage of respondents by countries (N=1,742; CEPS 2012) 78
- Figure 18:** At my institution no major decision is passed without the agreement of students/student representatives – percentage of respondents' average grading by countries (N= 1,742; CEPS 2012) 79

## B. Tables

<b>Table 1:</b> Number of higher education institutions per countries: university and non-university, private and public, 2010/11 academic year (Source: Compiled from national statistical offices)	48
<b>Table 2:</b> Grouping of the options the respondents evaluated as the current and preferred focus of their higher education institution	58
<b>Table 3:</b> Student involvement in external quality assurance (Source: Compiled from the Bologna Follow-Up Group National Reports and from legislation)	75
<b>Table 4:</b> Student participation in institutional governance and elections of rectors (Source: Compiled from national legislation)	76
<b>Table 5:</b> Student involvement in institutional quality assurance bodies and procedures (Source: Compiled from Bologna Follow-Up Group National Reports 2010/11)	77
<b>Table 6:</b> National statistical services in the Western Balkan region	88

## C. Quotations from the interviews

<i>Interview 01</i> (08/02/2012)	17, 38, 79
<i>Interview 04</i> (23/03/2012)	28, 29
<i>Interview 07</i> (09/02/2012)	23, 62
<i>Interview 09</i> (22/03/2012)	61
<i>Interview 11</i> (22/02/2012)	23, 27
<i>Interview 23</i> (01/03/2012)	35, 37, 53
<i>Interview 27</i> (01/03/2012)	25
<i>Interview 29</i> (09/03/2012)	18, 28
<i>Interview 33</i> (22/02/2012)	29
<i>Interview 34</i> (16/03/2012)	16, 39-40
<i>Interview 36</i> (22/02/2012)	25
<i>Interview 37</i> (11/04/2012)	17
<i>Interview 42</i> (27/02/2012)	30
<i>Interview 43</i> (16/02/2012)	74
<i>Interview 46</i> (10/04/2012)	37
<i>Interview 48</i> (13/03/2012)	29, 68, 71, 80
<i>Interview 49</i> (16/03/2012)	20, 80

<i>Interview 51</i> (12/03/2012)	68, 80
<i>Interview 53</i> (15/03/2012)	51
<i>Interview 58</i> (23/03/2012)	70
<i>Interview 61</i> (21/03/2012)	70
<i>Interview 63</i> (21/03/2012)	71
<i>Interview 66</i> (27/03/2012)	16-17, 50
<i>Interview 67</i> (26/03/2012)	51
<i>Interview 68</i> (27/03/2012)	21
<i>Interview 73</i> (26/03/2012)	50

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliographical annex has been prepared for those who are interested in the results of the DEP project (2010 – 2013) published so far. Only papers published in English in international monographs and journals are listed. Papers are listed chronologically, including those already published or forthcoming in 2013.

### 2010

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## INDEX

### A

- Academic 8, 9, 17, 18, 20-22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 33-36, 38-46, 48-52, 58, 60, 62-72, 76, 77, 80, 82-87
  - a. staff 20, 21, 25, 40-42, 46, 51, 60, 69, 70, 82
  - a. freedom 44-46
- Access 6, 20, 27, 28, 33, 38, 49, 52, 69-72, 81, 82-86
- Accountability 43, 44
- Accreditation 15, 33, 35, 37, 43, 50, 52, 75, 83, 87
- Africa 65, 66
- Albania 7, 8, 14, 20, 21, 25, 26, 34, 35, 42, 45, 48, 49-52, 56, 59, 60, 63-68, 71, 76-78, 81, 82, 84, 88
- Arab countries 65
- Asia
  - East A. 66
- Austria 62
- Autonomy 15, 16, 23, 43-46, 69
  - external and internal a. 16, 43-46, 69
  - financial and academic a. 15, 23, 43- 46

### B

- Bologna 6, 25, 27-30, 62, 67, 74-77, 80, 85
- Bologna Process 9, 16, 17, 25-31, 66, 68, 74, 77, 80, 82
- Bosnia and Herzegovina 8, 13, 15, 22, 26, 34, 45, 47, 51, 52, 56, 59, 60, 64, 65, 74, 76-78, 82,

### C

- Canada 65
- Corruption 71
- Council of Europe 73, 76

- Croatia 8, 16, 20, 22, 26, 30, 34, 35, 39-41, 44-47, 49, 50, 52, 57, 61, 64-66, 68, 75-77, 83, 84, 88

### D

- Decision 5, 28, 39-43, 45, 52, 73-75, 77-80

### E

- Economy 19, 21, 22, 35, 36, 38, 39, 53, 58, 60, 72
- Elite 50, 68, 71, 72
- Elitism 67, 71
- Employability 20, 55, 58, 59
- Employment 13, 20, 51, 71
- Enrolment 13, 45, 47, 48, 68, 69, 72, 83, 85, 87
- Equality 10, 67, 69-72
- Equity 5, 6, 33, 67-72
- Europe 6, 7, 9, 16, 18-20, 24, 28, 46, 55, 61, 65, 67
  - Eastern E. 6, 11, 62-65
- European Union 12, 33, 86
- Europeanisation 15, 16, 31, 73, 80
- Excellence 20, 33, 35-38, 68, 69-72
- Exclusion 71

### F

- Faculty 20, 23, 27, 30, 40, 41, 50, 55, 76, 80, 81
  - F. of Economics, University of Ljubljana 66
  - self-standing f. 34, 45
  - private (vs. public) f. 34, 37, 50
- Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 22, 45, 47, 82
- Fee 49

- tuition f. 49, 68, 71, 72
- Financing 35, 39-41, 49
- Fragmentation 9, 34, 39, 40, 44
- Funding 29, 33-36, 49, 66, 68, 72

**G**

- Globalisation 6
- Governance 9, 10, 16, 22, 23, 39, 41, 42, 45, 46, 73, 75-77, 80
  - collegial g. 41, 42, 46
  - professional(ised) g. 41
- Government 15, 17, 20, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 42, 49

**I**

- India 66
- Industry 20, 21, 29, 36, 55, 58, 59
- Institution 5-9, 13-20, 22, 23, 25-28, 33-40, 42-43, 45, 47-53, 55-64, 66, 68-74, 76-79, 82-87
  - private (higher education) i. 8, 15, 18, 37, 38, 48-53, 71
- Integration 8, 16, 25
  - institutional i. 22, 23, 40, 45
  - functional i. 40
- Internationalisation 5, 9, 15, 16, 18, 31, 61, 62, 66

**K**

- Kosovo 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 22, 26, 47-52, 56, 60, 63-66, 69, 71, 77, 78, 84, 86, 88

**L**

- Legislation 9, 14, 17, 34, 73, 75, 76, 87

**M**

- Macedonia 8, 11, 15-17, 25, 26, 35, 36, 43, 50-52, 58, 64-66, 69, 71, 74-77, 85, 88

- Management 14, 22, 41, 42, 46, 49
- Market 33, 40, 45, 48, 51, 55, 80
  - labour market 20, 55, 56, 58

Masters 30, 85

- professional vs. research m. 68

Meritocracy 71

Ministry 8, 17, 23, 28, 30, 39, 42, 45, 70, 81, 86, 87

Montenegro 8, 11, 15, 26, 43, 49, 51, 58, 64, 68, 74-76, 78, 85, 88

**N**

Nation 8, 21, 22, 33, 71, 72

**P**

- Policy 6, 9, 10, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24, 33-39, 45, 46, 48, 52, 57, 61, 63, 66, 68, 71-73, 80
- Policy maker 9, 22, 45, 46, 71, 72

**R**

Russia 64

**Q**

- Qualification 39
  - a higher education q. 69
- Quality 10, 15, 25-27, 36, 37, 44, 45, 48, 51, 53, 62, 67, 69-72, 78, 79
  - q. assurance 8, 18, 33, 35, 40, 43, 44, 46, 50, 52, 73-77, 80-83, 86-87

**R**

- Republic of Srpska 22, 47, 52, 75, 76, 82,
- Right 34, 39, 44, 45, 49, 50, 55, 69, 70, 74, 87
- Rochester Institute of Technology 71

- Role 10, 17, 19, 20, 22, 35, 39, 58,  
62, 69, 73, 74
- r. of higher education in-  
stitutions 9, 17, 21, 22, 37,  
55-60, 70, 71
- S**
- Serbia 8, 11, 15, 26, 41, 45-49, 58,  
64, 65, 68, 74, 76, 78, 84, 86,  
88
- Slovenia 5-9, 11, 15-17, 20, 26, 30,  
34-36, 39-41, 44, 49, 51, 52, 57,  
58, 61, 64-66, 69, 74-77, 86-88
- Socialism (Socialist) 14, 21, 39,  
50, 55, 72
- South America 66
- State 8, 16, 21-23, 33, 44, 45, 49,  
52, 61, 63, 69-72, 82, 83, 85,  
86, 88
- Student 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 27-29,  
33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 42, 44, 45,  
47-52, 56, 58, 61-63, 67-70,  
72-87
- budget (and non-budget)  
s. 49, 68
  - good and bad s. 67-69, 72
  - s. participation 73, 74, 76,  
77, 80
  - s. selection 67, 72
- T**
- Turkey 64, 65
- U**
- University 5, 6, 8, 10, 14-18,  
20-23, 26, 27, 34-37, 39-48, 50,  
51, 55-59, 62, 66-69, 71, 73-81,  
83-85, 87
- American University of  
Kosovo 71
  - private (vs. public) u. 14-  
16, 37, 47, 48, 51, 69
  - South East European  
University, Tetovo 50
  - University of Ljubljana 5,  
6, 40, 66
  - University of Novi Sad 22
  - University of Banja Luka  
22
  - University of Pristina 84,  
85
  - University of Pristina,  
Kosovska Mitrovica 48
  - University of Montenegro  
76
  - The Open University,  
London 5
  - Poznan University 5
  - Kassel University 5
  - Karlstad University 5
  - Göteborg University 5
  - University of Twente 5
- USA 65, 71
- V**
- Value 15, 24, 31, 46, 50, 55, 69, 73
- egalitarian v. 67, 70-72
- W**
- Western Balkans 5, 7, 10, 13, 18,  
19, 24, 25, 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 46,  
47, 55, 58, 60-64, 67-69, 72, 76,  
77, 80
- Y**
- Yugoslavia 7, 13, 21, 22, 39, 40, 42,  
45, 57



The dynamics of higher education in the region of the Western Balkans with a population of almost 25 million unfortunately still remains on the margins of contemporary higher education studies. The regional higher education has never been the subject of systemic research; there is both a lack of data and a lack of prior studies. In addition, this area of research is determined by a controversial logic of the common and the different, the uniform and the diverse. This is not only in our case – i.e., when discussing higher education – but also when studying other segments of societies in the region.

\* \* \*

Recent conflicts, consequent reconstruction of societies and delayed economic and institutional transition considerably affected higher education in most countries of the Western Balkans. The interviewees (people in the leading positions) showed a clear identification with European cultural space when imagining the post-conflict recovery and the future of their country or institution. There is an obvious tendency to take over ideas from abroad, copy policy solutions and refer to perceived successful cases of other countries. Yet there are ideas, narratives, discourses, perceptions, conceptualisations and attitudes that indicate a significant level of idiosyncrasy in the examined region.

\* \* \*

*I think that in these lands of ours private initiative has been allowed too soon – not only on the higher education level, but also on other levels of education. [...] When we get the right to establish a private Faculty or University we will do this – not for the sake of the prosperity of our community, [...] but because we need money for our private pockets. The private higher education institutions – not only in [our country], but in the broader region – are in the first place commercially oriented. (Interview 66; 27/03/2012).*



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