NEO-NATIONALISM AND UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT
The European Union is likely the most far-developed cross-border public space for higher education. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) both span an even larger number of countries including associate and partner countries of the EU. Based on shared European values, such as academic freedom, cross-border cooperation, and mobility, these policy frameworks have been developed in Europe over the last decades and with much success. HE systems in this area are thus well-positioned to benefit from cross-border mobility and collaboration but may at the same time face a certain loss of control over HE, for instance with respect to access due to the cross-border flows of students. This seems to make them vulnerable to populist tendencies and neo-nationalist politics seeking to inhibit the free movement of students, scholars, and data. Such tendencies have never been completely absent on the "old continent" but resurged over the uneven outcomes of globalization, the effects of the global financial and consequent Euro crisis, and the refugee crisis. Meanwhile, the impact of the coronavirus crisis is still by and large unknown. Populist tendencies seem now to be turning against the EU, with its freedom of movement for persons (i.e. open borders) as one of its cornerstones and are therefore of concern for the HE sector. Countries such as the UK, Switzerland, Denmark, and the Netherlands have a different position in the European landscape but are all struggling with the complexity of combining the virtues of an open system with constrained national sovereignty. Sovereignty is required in terms of steering capacity in order to balance access, cost, and quality, i.e. the well-known "higher education trilemma." In open systems this is challenged by the "globalization trilemma", which states that countries cannot have national sovereignty, (hyper)globalization and democracy at the same time. How are the EU, its Member States, and the HE sector responding? Will the Union stay united (i.e. Brexit)? Are the legal competencies of the EU in HE strong enough? What about the many European university associations, leagues, and networks? And what do the millions of (former) Erasmus students have to say?

Keywords: Neo-nationalism, populism, universities, EU, Brexit, multi-level governance, open systems, institutional autonomy, academic freedom

> Break the walls that hem you in . . . Our individual liberties are not givens. Democracy is not something we can take for granted. Neither is peace, and neither is prosperity. But if we break down the walls that hem us in, if we step out into the open and have the courage to embrace new beginnings, everything is possible.
> Angela Merkel, Harvard Commencement 2019[1]

Nationalism is not new to Europe, it characterized some of its darkest periods, notably in the 20th century. But since the end of World War II, for 75 years, European countries have lived in peace and moved steadily toward cooperation and interconnectedness. Their shared economic and political interests converged in the European Union 1992, eventually as a joint response to globalization. Higher education has been part of the process at every step and in fact became part of that response, supported by the creation of the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area.[2] But the political winds seem to be shifting, and there are signs of a new age of populism and nationalism emerging in Europe. This is a development that challenges

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universities to rethink their social contract and missions in local, national, European, and global contexts, and that has real consequences.

The following chapter in the forthcoming book, Neo-Nationalism and Universities, briefly discusses the character of current neo-nationalist movements in Europe and differing regional and age-related perceptions on the values of the European Union. Among many EU member nations, there remains significant support for the European Union and shared values on insuring mobility, particularly among younger people. But at the periphery of the Union, the dynamics are different and that translates into significant challenges for universities.

This is followed by an analysis of three related themes. The first theme is how the EU's regulatory context creates significant budget and policy challenges for EU member states with open systems of higher education, especially in smaller countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark. Higher education then easily becomes a target of populist discourse, as part of the welfare state arrangements that these parties claim to protect as "for their citizens first."

A second theme relates to how universities, and the European higher education community, are reacting to attacks on academic freedom and on university autonomy. A third theme is a discussion of how universities in Europe are reacting to this changing political landscape of populism: how are they involved in creating the social and political conditions that partially explain neo-nationalism? And how might universities be leaders in mitigating its impact?

Neo-Nationalism In Europe
The term neo-nationalism aims to define here the type of nationalism that emerged in the mid-2010s European political landscape and relates to anti-immigration and anti-globalization right-wing populism, protectionism, and Euroscepticism. It was used to signal that fears for downward social mobility and the effects of the global economic and consequent euro crisis could provide opportunities for a next phase of neo-nationalist re-orientation.[3] Such neo-nationalist trends can also be found at the left wing of the political divide.

In the Netherlands, right-wing anti-immigration parties such as the Centrum Party and later on the Centrum Democrats sprung up in early 1980s. They expired after leaders were excluded from parliament and other "cordon sanitaire" strategies (similar as in Belgium) were applied. In France it emerged when Jean-Marie Le Pen won a seat in European Parliament in 1984. Since then, the Front National (called Rassemblement National since 2018) has, now under the leadership of his daughter, tried to position itself against globalization and as the champion of those who see themselves as its losers (manifesting since 2018 as "les gilets jaunes"). Such agendas have become effectively married to anti-EU sentiments, and it was indeed France and the Netherlands that surprised the rest of Europe in 2005 with an overwhelmingly negative vote (55 percent and 61 percent respectively) in the referendum over the governance reform of the EU (or the then so-called "New EU Constitution").

Populist parties have seen significant gains in more European countries since.[4] Gains have been made in countries including Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Sweden, and Denmark and are not to be considered a temporary phenomenon.[5,6] However, it is important to note that even though nationalist parties are on the rise, there is no universal trend towards nationalism. Recent research finds that the increased visibility of nationalism in global politics is less attributable to a shift of global attitudes, but rather of the political and social articulation of these attitudes. The causes for this shift are country-specific but are overall grounded in the resonance of anti-elite discourse and a crisis of liberal democracy.[7]

Likewise, and contrary to what is often spread in the media, also in Europe there has also been no overall negative trend in identifying with the EU. Data from the Autumn 2018 Eurobarometer[8] reveal an on average upward trend in this area and a range of other salient topics for this discussion on neo-nationalism and universities in Europe (see table 1).

Overall the data confirm that trust in the EU has risen considerably since 2015. On average, Europeans trust the EU even more (42 percent) than their national government or parliament (both 35 percent). The overall image of the EU has also increased significantly, which is likely related to the improved economic situation of the EU (49 percent scores it as good) and related decrease in concerns about unemployment, which receives the lowest score (13 percent) in years (from 51 percent in 2009 and 2013).

For our discussion on the rise of nationalism, the data on identity, immigration, and the freedom of movement that are displayed in table 1 are particularly important and striking. First, the highest proportion of people since first asked in 2010 identify with the EU as a citizen (71 percent), often as having a dual European and national identity, with younger people expressing a stronger attachment to the EU than the older generations. Second, concerns over immigration decreased strongly, although it still is the biggest concern (followed by terrorism and economic issues). Third, the free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study,

and do business anywhere in the EU receives the highest level of support as a policy priority (83 percent) and is much more seen as a positive result of the EU (59 percent) than in 2015 (only 25 percent).

These trends seem to indicate that the EU is recovering from the downturns from the series of crises (global financial, Euro crisis, and the refugee crisis) since 2007. More trust also indicates more confidence in and expectations towards the EU in providing solutions, e.g. 69 percent of respondents are in favor of a common European policy on migration and 65 percent of a common foreign policy of the EU.

Table 1: Selected scores on topics relevant to neo-nationalism discussion (source Eurobarometer 2018)

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

But these trends are based on averages for the EU as a whole and it is thus important to look at the countries at the extremes at both sides of the spectrum. Smaller Nordic and Baltic states tend to be more on the higher end, while the United Kingdom, Greece, and some other countries in the South and Eastern parts of Europe appear rather frequently at the lower end.

With Brexit in mind, it is quite surprising to see that only 31 percent of UK citizens see immigration as the main concern facing the EU, which is well below the EU average of 40 percent and that the free movement of EU citizens still has the support of 74 percent of them. The anti-immigration argument has been used extensively in the Brexit campaign, but recently the concerns of UK citizens seem to have shifted to state financial and economic issues, which may actually be a result of the Brexit process so far. Brexit is also mentioned sometimes as a cause for more support for the EU in other member states.

A survey by the University of Amsterdam carried out in 10 EU members states prior to the 2019 elections for the European Parliament confirmed that only some 10-25 percent of the population would want to leave the EU, despite their criticism on the current functioning of the EU institutions. Interestingly, Poland and Hungary were at the lower end with only 10 percent who would like to leave the EU.[9]

Even though nationalist parties are on the rise in Europe, there appears to be no general shift of attitudes towards nationalism, a negative trend in identifying with the EU, or a decline in European supranational identity.[10] Bieber (2018) notes that this appears at first contradictory, but might be explained by the political (and social) articulation of nationalist attitudes that has changed and the polarization that shifted in support of nationalist candidates. In addition, I would argue that in Europe, not only do the nationalist parties articulate and actually fuel such attitudes, but more generally national politics may do so, as many national political leaders tend to blame the EU or "Brussels" for all sorts of problems. Attempting to keep nationalist parties in the margins, various centrist political parties have adopted some of the nationalistic policy agenda, e.g. on protectionism or even patriotism[11] and seem at times also to borrow from the anti-elite discourse.

Further wins of nationalist parties over their anti-EU agendas was thus feared for the elections of the European Parliament in May 2019. Indeed, the dominant center parties (Christian democrats and social democrats) saw their 53 percent majority diminished to

44 percent. However, the center, comprising the conservatives, the liberal democrats (enforced by President Macron's new party), and the winning green party, although more fragmented still got the support of 76 percent of the voters. Euro-critical parties won less then feared and remain so far scattered on both ends of the political spectrum. With a turn out much higher (51 percent) than in previous rounds (42 percent in 2014), it is considered that the European Parliament is enforced as a public agora and representative body where all views will be heard.

How Are Universities Affected?
For the higher education sector, the positive attitudes towards the EU, which are especially observed among the younger population, are of obvious importance — in particular the fact that the free movement of EU citizens to live, work, and study anywhere in the EU is seen as the most positive result of the EU and receives the highest level of support as a policy priority. The ERASMUS program was rated the fourth best outcome of the EU, after peace and the Euro! All this is crucial to sustain the beneficial conditions created in the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area and for continued financial support for cross-border collaboration, exchange, and mobility.

However, and as said before, these trends reflect averages for the EU as a whole, and perspectives may be quite different in the countries towards the extremes of the spectrum or otherwise more in the periphery of the EU. Universities located there risk to be more in the fire zone. As shown in table 1, the United Kingdom is a clear and rather dramatic example. The Brexit process has so far indirectly affected the sector in the UK already quite a bit (a 26 percent drop in European students coming to the UK[12] and European research staff returning to the continent) and is feared to cause much more damage.[13] Hungary is another sobering example. Although scores on European identity (80 percent) and in favor of free mobility (81 percent) are relatively high there, immigration is seen as an important threat to the EU (54 percent), combined with concerns (40 percent) regarding the national health and social security system.

Citizens may thus be easily mobilized against immigration. However, the political conspiracy built against George Soros as the founder of the Central European University (CEU), which eventually forced CEU to leave Hungary, cannot be attributed only to a shift in civic attitudes. It is also an anti-liberal ideological campaign of the government's increasingly autocratic leadership, which is a threat to liberal democracy itself. At the same time, other institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences, the Constitutional Court, the freedom of press, and certain NGO's are being attacked by the Hungarian government led by President Orbán. This caused the EU to trigger in 2018 an Article 7 disciplinary procedure against Hungary for undermining democratic rules and being "a clear risk of a serious breach of the values referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union":[14]

> The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.[15]

Shocking experiences also emerged in the EU's periphery, after the failed coup in 2016 in Turkey, officially still a candidate country of the EU,[16] where thousands of university deans and faculty members were fired or arrested. Apart from these extremely sad examples, in more moderate countries with non-authoritarian leaders, higher education can also be caught in the political polarization discussed above and become a target of populist discourse, which see higher education as part of the welfare state arrangements that these parties claim to protect as "for their citizens first" or even exclusively for them.

The Netherlands and Denmark are, for instance, countries with overall moderate scores on the above indicators and relatively high levels of trust in the EU — 60 percent and 57 percent respectively (the Netherlands shows a striking rise since Brexit). Yet governments in both countries are currently looking for measures to control or even reduce the number of international students studying at the national public universities, and campaigns against teaching in English have been launched over the last few years.[17]

Another example concerns Switzerland, which is not in the EU but is a member of the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) and participant in ERA and EHEA. As a result of its 2014 referendum on immigration, Switzerland lost its access to the EU research funding (Horizon2020) and mobility (ERASMUS) grants.[18] The same may happen following Brexit if the UK will indeed break with the EU's free movement principle. No signs that academics or students would escape these consequences are clear as yet.[19]

Consequences for Open Higher Education Systems
Neo-nationalism and populist movements, combined with the EU principles of the free movement of persons, are creating new challenges for national systems with open enrollment policies. The Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, and the UK have two

particular features in common. They are highly internationalized, and they belong to the strongest performing research systems globally in terms of quality and impact of their scientific output. They have the highest percentages of international students among OECD countries at doctoral level (>40 percent).[20] These students mostly concentrate in the STEM fields, which also contribute most to the countries' research performance. In the Netherlands, for instance, the percentage for international PhD students in STEM may be as high as 75 percent. Fifty percent of all scientific staff in technological universities are international as are 40 percent on average across all fields in the research university sector.[21] In the UK 40 percent of staff in the top universities are from the EU.

Clearly such "open systems" greatly benefit from open borders, and participation in EU programs further adds to their performance. They, for instance, have highest return on investment from funding by the European Research Council (ERC), by attracting many ERC grantees from other countries.[22] Yet, when the EU's free mobility principle is restricted by national priorities, they may face serious uncertainties regarding their ability to engage with the international community. The cases of Switzerland and the UK demonstrate that this principle is fundamental to receiving EU funding and for participation in ERA and EHEA. More generally, closing borders would be detrimental to their corporate and cultural sectors, as much as to their universities.

At the same time, it should be realized that such protectionist trends may not only be shaped by nationalist parties or by national governments. In some cases, the university sector itself may actually seek policies to more effectively influence the out- and in particular in-flow of academic and student talent. In the Netherlands, for instance, universities may on the one hand plea for continued tax exemptions for international staff (30 percent reduction for ex-pats for the first years after arrival), while on the other hand asking the government for more legally-sound options to control and direct the inflow of international students. The example of the Netherlands will be explained as a mini-case study in more detail below.

The need for more effective steering of student flows is understandable given the conditions in which universities and governments have to operate in Europe. The EU provides them with major opportunities for internationalization (i.e. open borders) but may at the same time constrain their options to regulate certain consequences at the level of the system or the institution. This is because the right of free movement of persons in the EU[23] implies that students from other EU Member States basically have access to higher education on the same conditions as Member States' domestic students. Initially this right provided a legal basis for student mobility and the start of the successful ERASMUS program in 1987, which is based on short-time and reciprocal student exchange. In the first decade of ERASMUS' operation this was further facilitated by the introduction of mobility instruments enabling the transfer of credits (ECTS) and the recognition of degrees (IDS).

With the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1998, a next step was taken to actually harmonize the degree systems of the Member States. Since then, the so-called Bologna Process shaped the European Higher Education Area in a much larger range of 48 countries.[24] After a decade of substantial system reform introducing a bachelor-master degree structure,[25] this started to result in more degree mobility, or "free mobility" (i.e. without regulation through ERASMUS learning contracts or support by grants). This in contrast to short-term exchange, provides no mechanisms to manage reciprocity or to balance the migration of students and faculty between countries. And these migration flows have become quite uneven indeed.

The Example of The Netherlands and Denmark
The Dutch research universities saw their percentage of international students more than double after the introduction of the Bologna reforms, from 5 percent in 2000 to over 12 percent in 2017. Due in part to their generally high position on global rankings (virtually all are in the top 200)[26] and broad provision of programs taught in English (23 percent at bachelor level and 74 percent at master level),[27] international students now account now for 25 percent of Dutch universities' master students. This percentage is more than double the OECD average. It is expected that these numbers will continue to rise, even though Dutch universities charge higher tuition fees (around 2000-4000 Euros per year for EU and European Economic Area students) than most other European countries, where studies may even be completely free.[28]

External effects, such as Brexit, may further contribute to this growth, which is now forecasted by the Ministry of Education & Science at 25 percent over the next five years. This could then bring the number of students from the EU-EEA up to some 50,000, i.e. the equivalent of two mid-size universities in a system of just fourteen public research universities, demanding some 15 percent of the public budget for that sector.[29] As the state contribution to the universities is an institutional lump-sum within a fixed macro-budget, the above-forecasted growth has already resulted in a significant decrease in per-capita funding over the last years and therefore the Dutch research universities now fear this trend will continue and affect the quality of teaching and learning.

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

The current limitations as experienced by universities are related to a general absence of quantitative caps for access to study programs in the Netherlands. All students that fulfill the formal entry requirements, be they Dutch or have other EU/EEA nationality, should thus be admitted. Only in some specific (professional, performing, or liberal arts) fields, universities are allowed to use a "numerus fixus" (cap) and select their applicants before admission. The number of graduate programs, especially those taught in English, using some form of selective admission has grown quickly. Institutions preferably use a combination of merit-based criteria, such as prior academic achievement, and background variables related to the students' home country or region.

However, Dutch students rallied against the former, as these criteria would also apply to them. They hitherto were admitted into master programs just on the basis of their bachelor's degree, but without extra criteria based on GPA or their level of English. They fear to lose the competition with international students. The national student union (LSVb) argued against the new admissions requirements, stating that: "As a Dutchman, it is difficult to compete with a multitude of foreign students, whose majority have better grades, *but who have developed less in other areas.*" [italics by author]".

Restricting access based on nationality is not feasible under national and EU legislation. Solutions have been sought by lawmakers to establish an enrollment cap, and thus selective admission, for English-taught tracks in programs that would then keep their Dutch-taught track without cap for open admission. But most programs do not have such parallel tracks, so this is obviously an expensive solution that could most likely only be applied in large-scale programs.

Denmark is facing comparable challenges. Moreover, tuition is free for EU/EEA students and loans and scholarships are available for them. Over the last years, students from the rest of the European Union have indeed collected the same generous support packages and fee waivers as Danish undergraduates. But Danish ministers are now questioning the value of this spending. Denmark asked the European Commission to help solve the problem of students who were unwilling to pay back study loans after leaving the country but found no support in Brussels. This problem has also occurred in the UK. The Danish government then tried solutions to restrict the inflow of EU/EEA students based on arguments consistent with EU regulations and legislation derived from national labor market needs. But these turned out to be complex to sustain once students graduated (and perhaps chose to leave the country). Consequently, the government required institutions to reduce the number of programs taught in English.

University rectors criticize these measures, claiming that such efforts to reduce numbers of international students by closing English-taught degree programs may limit the education of Danish students (i.e. programs may be not-sustainable in Danish because of lack of interest from only domestic students) and widen skills gaps.[30]

These mini case-studies on The Netherlands and Denmark demonstrate how complex the consequences of internationally attractive open higher education system can be. They also show how vulnerable universities may become as a result for nationalist or populist parties that easily criticize their international aspirations as part of their anti-globalization and anti-elite discourse.

A blunt example is the Dutch Forum for Democracy (FvD), a right-wing, national-conservative, and Eurosceptic political party established in 2015. During its election campaign, it launched a "left-wing indoctrination hotline" for students who suspect left-wing political bias on their campus.[31] The FvD won the Dutch provincial elections in March 2019 and its leader (who holds a PhD from Leiden University) attacked universities in his victory speech as "one of the institutions that undermine our society."[32] The FvD is popular among certain student groups. Yet other student bodies may be influenced by nationalist traits of left-wing political parties through their student unions.

It cannot be denied that it is difficult to explain to Dutch taxpayers why over 22,000 German degree students need to be educated "on their purse" when only some 1,200 Dutch degree students study in Germany, which is a country with a much larger economy, only slightly lower GDP (6 percent less than the Dutch GDP per capita), and virtually free higher education. The Dutch government actually stimulated the Dutch universities to recruit German students in the 1990s, as part of its "cross-border higher education policy". Especially universities in border regions, such as Maastricht University and Twente University, were successful in doing so, by introducing many English-taught programs. Maastricht by eventually even changing its entire operational language into English. However, Dutch students were less motivated to study in Germany and efforts to balance these flows failed.

A former ministerial official commented in 2011 that "recruiting German students is absurd and socially irresponsible. Only some universities benefit, while the government has to pick up the bill and less budget is left for domestic students."[33] Flows between the Netherlands and Belgium (3,600 to and 3,272 from Belgium), or with the UK (3,360 to and 3,100 from the UK)[34] are better balanced, despite the unequal population size and bigger differences in GDP and tuition fees, in the case of the UK. It seems that in particular small countries with large neighbors may face such problems. Austria, for instance, has had similar concerns.

It is clear that, as much as there is support for subsidized short-term student exchange under the ERASMUS program (its budget is expected to be doubled to some 30 billion euros for the period 2021-2027 and it will be open to students from around the world), the free mobility of degree students within Europe is more difficult to sustain under the current conditions. A money-follows-student system at EU-level could be a solution but does not seem feasible in the short term given the important differences between member states in terms of tuition fee levels and student financial support systems. The current political climate also makes it difficult.

Universities in countries with open systems may greatly benefit from the inflow of international students. In the Dutch case, the continued existence of its research universities in border regions may even depend on these flows. International talent is also crucial for the national R&D base, and Dutch universities thus received strong support from the corporate sector for their 2018 internationalization agenda.[35] However, such countries have also seen the support for nationalist and populist parties rise over the last decade.

Ministers are then caught between issues of national interest, such as R&D performance, labor market demands for highly skilled immigrants, economic growth, and nationalistic pressures from upcoming political parties. In the view of such nationalist parties, solutions for national problems are seen in closing borders rather than in keeping them open. In the same fashion, internationalization of higher education may be seen as a problem rather than an opportunity. But as said before, these pressures do not only come from external political parties or populist groups.

Universities may actually contribute in a certain way to these trends themselves. One way they do so is when they chose to open, amidst the rise of nationalism, very popular study programs such as business studies and psychology in English, as did the University of Amsterdam in 2018. This caused an (to be expected) overwhelming number of international applications, which the university lacked the infrastructure to adequately handle. The City of Amsterdam also was not able to provide proper housing for these students. Obviously, this triggered critical responses from the student organizations, but also from populist voices in the City Council, both arguing for "domestic students first." In other student cities (Groningen and Utrecht) student organizations spoke out against "international students as a business model" and occupied university squares to protest over the lack of student housing. Conservative student fraternities tend to select their house mates out of their circles, and "no foreigners" was frequently found to be a top criterium.

Student parties may also find support in nationalist parties (and vice versa) in their critique on teaching in English. For the students, this is connected to their fight against selective admission (see above) and presented as a threat to teaching quality, based on ideas (rather than evidence) about the supposed weak level of English of their lecturers. They may find some lecturers support their views. An action group "Beter Onderwijs Nederland" (Better Education Netherlands), led by a philosophy lecturer from VU University Amsterdam, even sued two universities (Maastricht and Twente, as mentioned above, both located at the German border and with high percentages of international students) over neglecting the Dutch higher education act by teaching (too much) in English. They lost this case in court, but the Minister was urged by parliament to generate additional regulation on the use of Dutch as the language of instruction. Cynically perhaps, it was also the VU University Amsterdam that recently decided in to close its bachelor program in Dutch language & literature over a 60 percent drop in enrolment over the last decade.[36]

The above presented examples may serve to further illustrate that, as was stated before, universities cannot assume that nationalistic anti-internationalization or anti-globalization trends are exclusively manifest outside their walls. I will come back to this in the last section.

The Complexities of Multi-Level HE Governance in Europe
In balancing access, cost, and quality of a higher education system, governments face a trilemma, as they can always only reach two out of three politically desirable goals: low public and private (tuition fees) costs and mass access to higher education, assuming that they want to keep the quality of higher education at least stable.[37] In open higher education systems, governments face an additional challenge: the "globalization trilemma," in that they cannot have national sovereignty, (hyper) globalization, and democracy at the same time.[38] Thus, open higher education systems benefit from internationalization but may lose control over access to higher education. This is especially true in the European context, where higher education is a welfare state arrangement,

heavily subsidized by the state. The national steering capacity (sovereignty) needed to balance internationalization with the costs and quality of higher education is being reduced.[39,40]

This was illustrated in the previous sections with the example of EU/EEA students who wish to study in smaller states such the Netherlands and Denmark and who have the right to do so under EU regulation. Such countries are thus struggling with the complexity of combining the virtues of an open system with constrained national sovereignty in their steering capacity. Likewise, universities in such open systems may be well positioned to contribute to and benefit from internationalization but the same time also face a (certain) loss of control over their policies regarding admission, fees, and quality.

The EU (with ERA and EHEA) is likely the world's most far-developed publicly-regulated space for higher education to (co-)operate across borders, but the EU Member States are also reluctant to give up sovereignty, especially so in the case of (higher) education. Consequently, the conditions for academic cooperation and mobility, as created under the EU Treaty,[41] are not in balance with the EU's legal competencies to coordinate higher education, and thus its ability to regulate for the consequences of it, while those of its member states in these areas are being (indirectly) reduced. The background of this dilemma will be explained in more detail below.

European higher education functions in a multi-level governance context[42] in which common (EU) objectives constantly need to be balanced with national (and regional) preferences. This may take shape through internal negotiation processes, such as for internal market regulation. In higher education this complexity is enhanced since activities may emerge both from intergovernmental initiatives between all or some Member States, or from supranational initiatives taken by the European Commission.

The role of the EU is exercised by the three main institutions involved in EU legislation: the European Parliament, which represents the EU's citizens; the Council of the European Union, which represents governments of the Member States; and the European Commission, which represents the interests of the Union as a whole.[43] The EU's legal competencies (capabilities or powers) are defined by the EU Treaties. There are currently two main Treaties, which together set out the competences of the EU: the Treaty on European Union (TEU, signed in Maastricht in 1992) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU, Lisbon 2007).[44]

The development of the EU has impacted universities primarily in their research function. Its role to stimulate, coordinate, and finance research has been confirmed as a "shared competency" under article 4 of TFEU. This implies that both the EU and EU countries are able to legislate and adopt legally binding acts.[45] Obviously, with a budget of nearly €80 billion for its current Horizon2020 Framework Program for R&D (2014-2020), the EU plays an important role in the so-called European Research Area (ERA).

Its influence on the education side is weaker, since the EU only has a "supporting competency" under article 6 of TFEU and can thus only intervene to support, coordinate, or complement the action of EU countries. This is based on the so-called subsidiarity principle, which is strictly upheld by the Member States as to preserve the quality and linguistic and cultural diversity of their education systems. As has been set out above, EU initiatives such as the ERASMUS program were found useful for the exchange of students and staff, joint programs and degrees, and the recognition of qualifications. This ultimately led to the initiative to converge national higher education systems, the Bologna Process.

However, this was an intergovernmental (bottom-up) initiative by Member States, and neither the process nor the resulting EHEA have ever been fully entrusted to the EU's competencies at supranational level. Despite the many supportive activities that were funded by the EU, its series of policy papers on higher education, and the growth of the budget for ERASMUS to the current nearly €15 billion (for 2014-2020), the legal competency of the EU in (higher) education still belongs to the weakest of such categories.

European universities are confronted with different aspects of EU law through legally binding instruments such as treaties, regulations, and directives ("hard law"), or through recommendations, opinions, communications, notices, and guidelines ("soft law"). As argued before, the EU context offers them opportunities, although their implementation can be a challenge, especially when they differ from previous traditions, policies, or practices). But it may also imply a loss of control over their policies regarding, for instance, admission, fees, and quality. The extent to which universities can effectively navigate this complex space depends on their degree of institutional autonomy.

Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom Under Siege in Europe?
Although with limited powers related to national higher education policies, the European integration process has had a major impact on universities. European universities anticipated these changes in the late 1980s when they formulated their main principles and values as their common European inheritance. These were laid down in a charter in 1988, at the 900th anniversary of Europe's oldest university, the University of Bologna. This charter, called the "Magna Charta Universitatum"[46] states institutional autonomy and academic freedom among its fundamental principles:

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

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

At its inauguration, the charter was signed by some 500 European rectors and has since been signed by many more universities from around the world. To date a total of 889 Universities from 88 countries on all continents have signed, with more than a dozen others waiting to join at the next signing ceremony.

In 1998, at its 10th anniversary, European university leaders decided to launch an Observatory on the universities' fundamental values and rights in order to more closely monitor the implementation of the principles outlined in the Charter. At that occasion they noted that:

> Indeed, Europe had changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the new political situation of an open territory (in which national borders were less and less important) called for constant analysis of the changes affecting academia, from within or from without, as the relevance of old references was being questioned by the sheer speed and extent of social transformations in the region — from Lisbon to Vladivostok.[47]

The Observatory continuously monitors the key values and fundamental principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Concerns are rising in these areas and formal statements of concern for Turkish scholars and universities were published in 2016 and for Institutional Autonomy in Hungary (i.e. the case of CEU) in 2017[48]. At the Magna Charta's 30th anniversary in 2018, the President of the Observatory marked that: "In times of political turbulence, competing claims, and internal fragmentation, values matter more than ever for universities as they are they are foundational principles of institutional self-understanding and positioning in society." He launched a project on living values in higher education institutions.[49]

The European University Association (EUA), which represents more than 800 universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries, is also concerned with monitoring and promoting institutional autonomy as a core principle of university governance and advocating academic freedom as the single most important basis for meaningful academic research and teaching.[50] It does so in close cooperation with other organizations such as the Magna Charta Observatory, the International Association of Universities (IAU), and Scholars at Risk.

EUA has been observing the situation with regard to institutional autonomy closely for more than a decade through its Autonomy Scorecard,[51] as a basis for regular policy dialogues at national and European levels. Until 2017, the scorecard analyses showed that the level of autonomy that universities in Europe varied greatly but showed improvements.[52] However, in 2017 EUA became concerned and noted:

> While earlier assessments showed promising developments towards more autonomy in Europe, there is currently no distinguishable uniform trend. …. The Old Continent faces …] rising populism, weakening solidarity and pressure on some of its most important values — all of which affect the ability of the higher education and research sectors in fulfilling their missions. In this scenario, university autonomy and academic freedom are of particular concern, as there is a growing tendency for governments to interfere. We have recently seen concrete cases in countries in Europe. … This is worrisome as autonomy and academic freedom are crucial to the well-functioning of universities.[53]

Against this backdrop, EUA launched a renewed European-wide dialogue and dedicated its 2017 annual conference, "Autonomy and Freedom: The future sustainability of universities," to the issue. Since then, it actively continues to report and promote institutional autonomy as a core principle and keeps warning that "in a tense political environment, attempts to limit or undermine autonomy can take many forms,"

The degree of institutional autonomy of universities in Europe varies, and problems such as in Hungary are extreme cases, which do certainly not represent a general trend in all European countries. The way in which academic freedom is being discussed varies perhaps even more. Nevertheless, the European university sector has found common ground to express its concerns and wish to stand together with colleagues under siege. #IstandwithCEU took many to the streets of Budapest in 2017, and at the end of 2018, the Rectors Associations of 10 countries signed the "Vienna Declaration"[54] warning against tendencies to restrict academic freedom and threats to democracy and defining the role of higher education in society. But what can be done beyond public statements, debate, and advocacy?

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000)[55] provides in article 13 that "the arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint" and that "academic freedom shall be respected," Institutional autonomy has been generally promoted by the European Commission throughout its series of policy papers and agendas on the modernization of higher education in Europe. However, as explained above, the EU does not have sufficient legal competencies to directly interfere in the field of (higher) education and Member States could be reluctant to follow its recommendations.

Interestingly, the case of Hungary — where the CEU's institutional autonomy and academic freedom were heavily attacked by the government, forcing it to eventually move from Budapest to Vienna — triggered the EU to interfere in a broader and more drastic sense. It did so through Article 7 of the Treaty on the EU (see above).

This prompted the European Parliament later in 2018 to adopt a Recommendation on Defense of Academic Freedom.[56] It provides reference to the Art 13 of the Charter on Fundamental Rights of the EU, to its Human Rights Guidelines, and to a range of other EU official documents. It also reflects UNESCO's definition of academic freedom: "The right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies".

The European Parliament recommended that the Council, the Commission, and other EU institutions express the importance of academic freedom in all aspects of the EU's external policies and activities. The objective is to demonstrate active support for students and academics who are at risk through infringements of academic freedom. It also proposed that a similar commitment to academic freedom be part of the Copenhagen criteria for future accession to the EU, and specifically mentions the attack on academic freedom in Hungary and calls for new initiatives to enhance Academic Freedom in existing programs like H2020 and Erasmus+.[57] However, despite a last minute effort by the leader of the EP's conservatives to broker a deal between CEU and the Technical University of Munich,[58] which would allow CEU to stay in Budapest, the decision has been taken that it will move to Vienna. CEU's President bitterly condemned Western powers for not having done enough.[59]

These major EU programs for research and education are being opened up to the world, including countries where concerns regarding institutional autonomy and academic freedom are more widespread than in Europe, such as Turkey, China, and Russia. European higher education seems to be dedicated to reach out to the world and to uphold these fundamental European values, which belong to the core of the European humanist tradition, beyond its own region. In the same fashion, the Magna Charta's global outreach can be noted as well as the (summer 2019 Bologna) event on "The Bologna Process goes Global: fundamental values of the EHEA beyond 2020."

Yet the European universities leaders who signaled two decades ago in Bologna (see above) that Europe had changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and that the new political situation of an open territory called for constant analysis of the changes affecting academia were right. Or as stated by Michael Ignatieff, President of CEU: "Academic freedom or even the university cannot be taken for granted."[60] Threats to autonomy and academic freedom do not exclusively come from outside Europe but are growing within Europe as well.[61]

Universities as Followers or Leaders
Many universities in Europe have focused their attention increasingly on cross-border activity in Europe and on being globally competitive. While at the same time, perhaps, they are neglecting globalization consequences such as growing inequality and

diversity in their local communities. Conceptually, many failed to make the connection between the flip-side of globalization and their internationalization efforts, or in practical terms, to make internationalization more inclusive.

Universities can then easily be caught in the political polarization connected to the rise of nationalism and become targets of populists that happily critique their internationalization aims as part of their anti-globalization and anti-elite discourse. The Dutch experience with the FvD party's attack on universities (see above) may have wider relevance in this respect.[62]

When universities are being seen as becoming "footloose from society as an academic jet-set of cosmopolitan types who live in their own world"[63] — as other global elites, political and financial, that are being targeted by populist revolt — the question can be asked whether they have ended up "on the wrong side of history" and whether this is universities' own fault.[64]

The blame seems to be on the drive to become world-class universities, in particular the pursuit of positioning on global rankings, that would "jeopardize universities' national mission and relevancy in the societies that give them life and purpose."[65] Clearly, the rise of populism has been a wake-up call. The shock-effect was in 2016 observed as: "What seems to have died is the European international education community's faith in the inevitability of the cosmopolitan project, in which national boundaries and ethnic loyalties would dissolve over time to allow greater openness, diversity and a sense of global citizenship."[66]

But signals were already clear in the early 2000s, when students took to the streets in the South of Europe to protest against European higher education policies, particularly the Bologna Process and the Lisbon aims to make "Europe the world's most competitive knowledge economy." This European response to globalization was in fact never widely shared by these constituencies, who perceived it as a neo-liberal Anglo-Saxon trend in contrast with European social values.[67] These EU ambitions got seriously set back by the vote against the new EU Treaty in 2005 mentioned above and the global financial crisis.[68] Students also protested in 2006 when ministers discussed future scenarios of higher education at an OECD meeting in Athens.[69]

Despite the turmoil created by these protests outside, the one scenario that predicted the current backlash on globalization was not considered or even discussed.[70] Yet it was already clear by then that globalization creates global economic imbalances with detrimental effects on social cohesion, that a rebalancing of globalization was needed, and that this would have consequences for universities.

I argued in 2007 that it required broadening their missions for internationalization to not only respond to the profitable side of globalization but also to address related problems such as migration and social exclusion. Universities needed to be more open and inclusive, to balance economic and social responsiveness, and to (re-)define their 'social contract' in a globalized context. In the local context, this means enhancing access for migrant and minority students, supporting the integration of student groups with different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, thus embracing diversity in all its dimensions and making internationalization inclusive.[71] [72]

UNESCO also stated (although rather vaguely) in 2015 that "the social contract that binds higher education institutions to society at large needs to be redefined in a context of increased global competition." The European Commission, alerted by the radical events during the Euro-crisis (again mostly in the south, notably in Greece), revised its hitherto rather utilitarian education agenda by stating: "With regard to the recent tragic events related to radicalization in parts of Europe, a particular focus on civic democratic, intercultural competencies and critical thinking is even more urgent."[73]

But have universities been sufficiently aware of the looming tensions that led to the rise of populism? Certainly not in all cases, or at least not early enough. The vice-chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge ensured the author during a conference dinner only 10 days prior to the Brexit referendum that they were not worried about it at all because: "We wrote a letter to the Prime Minister!" Ninety percent of people working in UK higher education voted remain, and they realized the support for Brexit outside universities and their cities only afterwards. Understanding the consequences for academic mobility and other European citizenship rights also occurred only later, as the sector had been focused so much on its economic implications.[74]

As part of the current discourse top universities may be especially criticized for what they have been neglecting locally and turning off those left behind, while pushing so hard for their global missions. But even at system level is it not obvious that higher education can sufficiently compensate for the growing inequalities resulting from globalization.[75]

As was stated before, universities cannot assume that nationalistic anti-internationalization or anti-globalization trends are exclusively manifest outside their walls. Skepticism of internationalization can also be heard inside academia. Such critical voices

may rail not only against the use of English as a second or foreign language for teaching and learning, but also against global rankings and the resulting reputation race, with its annual tables of losers and winners, and against the recruitment of international students for institutional income, which are all considered as forms of 'academic capitalism'. These internal voices do not represent the dominant academic perspective or the formal institutional view. But it raises the question whether academia's internal debate is also developing conservative traits that may result in tendencies towards academic nationalism, protectionism, or indeed isolationism?[76]

Most universities may thus have been followers rather than leaders, but the rise of populism is not only a wake-up call. It is also an opportunity to speak up more loudly for open societies and to recover their sense of social purpose. Various constructive responses are emerging in this respect. Notable is the increased attention for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Bottom-up initiatives launched by EUA are responding to the notion that increased migration has contributed in Europe to more cultural diversity, but also that social diversity and inequality are hotly debated in the wake of the financial crisis.[77]

The EUA launched a project for refugees (InHERE) with a refugees-welcome-map showing an overview of initiatives of higher education institutions and related networks and organisations supporting refugee students, researchers, and academic staff.[78] A major and early example is Germany's DAAD program for refugee students,[79] which is in line with the Chancellor Merkel's welcoming policy for refugees and for which German HE was praised in a recent Eurydice report.[80] Another example is Ireland's universities of sanctuary.[81] Supporting actions at European level include the Erasmus+ sponsored program on the recognition of refugees' qualifications and the Council of Europe's European Qualifications Passport for Refugees.[82]

In the UK, where the top universities (Oxbridge) had been accused of "social apartheid" in 2017,[83] the government in a more top-down fashion boosted in 2018 the universities' civic role and shift of focus from global to local with a £500 million fund and the launch of "civic university agreements,"[84] that aim to promote regional collaborations and more local student engagement.

So we are indeed seeing some remarkable changes. Ror instance, the University of Oxford now for the first time in its 900 years history is offering places to students with lower grades from disadvantaged backgrounds[85]. The ultimate response to inequality and anti-elite discourse came from French President Macron, who proposed to abolish his alma mater, the elite École Nationale d'Administration.[86] Across Europe, the concept of inclusive internationalization is slowly beginning to resonate and becoming more wide-spread, although universities still seem to find an integration of diversity and internationalization agendas (and staff units) challenging.

Despite these recent initiatives, big questions concern European academic leaders' that many are, thus far, ill-equipped to deal with. Phrases like "We have created Europe and now we have to create Europeans," which were first heard after the rejection of the EU Constitution in 2005, are being repeated and the universities' role in this is being questioned. Did we fail to develop European identity and citizenship — a goal of the Erasmus program — in our students? Should we expect to hear more from the more than three million former Erasmus students, in defense of Europe, or have they all become the now-criticized cosmopolitan elite? Did we fail to educate them as critical thinkers, towards social responsibility, democratic citizenship, and civic engagement in support of an open society?[87]

Despite all the European studies courses and mobility programs, young Europeans seem to have taken democracy, open borders, freedom, liberal values, and the institutions that protect them too much for granted. To them, the EU is just understood as an open market or trading zone, not as a peace project anymore, is what critics say. Universities revamp educational ideas, and curriculum concepts from the early 1990s in response.

Yet some students are standing up as leaders of bottom-up initiatives in support of European values and open borders.[88] Many others may be held back by ambivalence about complex and sometimes aggressive debates on identity, diversity, inclusion, and exclusion, or may be shy of being seen in leadership roles as part of the "elite" themselves. It is very much the question whether the values of liberalism / a liberal democracy can actually be defended on the basis of individualism.

As the data from the Eurobarometer demonstrated, a large majority of Europeans are in favor of open borders and free mobility. Data from a most recent survey held in France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Poland confirms that an overwhelming majority of Europeans support open society values such as freedom of expression, upholding the rule of law, and pluralism.[89] The support would even be stronger in the academic world, which benefits so much from EU programs for mobility and cooperation, which are now being opened up to the world. But the general support for immigration from outside the EU has waned since the 2015 refugee crisis. Has it been naïve to believe in a borderless world? Conservative historian Niall Ferguson points to the many

countries, failed states, that show little effort to keep their citizens within their borders. Consequently, more than 700 million adults are looking to emigrate, with Europe as their most favorite destination (23 percent compared to 21 percent for the U.S.).

At the same time the resistance against massive immigration is rising in many of the most popular immigration countries.[90] This is certainly one of the main challenges for the EU, which is still lacking an integrated / joint and more elaborate immigration and foreign policy. Challenges become consequently related to the EU's internal open borders. These require European solutions and thus more trust in the European institutions that can realize these, however much this may be resisted by national(ist) politicians.

They better hurry up. Alarm bells are ringing. Right-wing populist parties are targeting your young voters with growing success and are attempting to establish new academies. For instance, the "Institut de Sciences Sociales, Économiques et Politiques" in France, was launched by the Rassemblement National and is aimed at training "a new elite to change the dominant beliefs in society." An alt-right university to train nationalists has been proposed by Donald Trump's former spin doctor Steve Bannon, although the latter plan has been revoked by the Italian government.[91] The hammer also continues to blow in Hungary where the government continues to restrict the academic independence of the Academy of Sciences. In defense, the Network of such Academies of Europe (ALLEA) joins forces to address the increasingly hostile political climate towards science in a growing part of Western societies.[92] The sector is called to defend European values and to realize that only "respecting the highest levels of integrity and ethics will allow us to stand up against sceptics and make it clear that "science is not just another opinion."

Defeatism should be avoided by university leaders. We owe it to the young Europeans to be optimistic; this is "a moral duty", as we learned from Karl Popper, the great defender of an open society. In this spirit Leiden University's rector wrote, "If history has taught us anything, it is that out of conflict comes collaboration. Brexit won't hold back science because the challenges the world faces are bigger than the fights between nations and it is in everyone's best interest to work together".[93]

POST SCRIPTUM, 29 May 2020

This paper was written in early 2019, with an update on Brexit in early 2020, but prior to the outbreak of the global coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. At this point in time it is too early to fully assess the possible implications of this new crisis on higher education globally as well as in Europe. For the world, a key question seems to be whether it will lead to (a further) de-globalization or re-globalization and whether this could imply a rebalancing of the global HE landscape. For the EU, key questions are whether it will bring the Union closer together or drive towards further fragmentation, re-regionalization, or even re-nationalization. Will the EU be able to sustain its internal open structures on which European academic cooperation is based? What's more, will it be able to rebuild globally the kind of multilateralism on which international academic cooperation has been based and who will be its partner now that the U.S. seems to be leaving that scene? Only with stronger internal cohesion will the EU be able to play a significant role externally.

However, the coronavirus crisis has put the EU's internal cohesion under great pressure and amplified already existing internal tensions. Upon the virus outbreak, all Member States chose nationalist - protectionist solutions and closed their borders. The European Commission was unable to coordinate or to provide much needed medical supplies. These came notably from China, using its "health Silk Road" for "face mask diplomacy," thus reaching further into countries in the South, Central, and Eastern Europe (the so-called "CEEC 17+1" with which China signed New Silk Road agreements over the last couple of years). Hungary, where after the CEU was banned by the government, invited a Chinese university to establish a branch campus. Meanwhile, negotiations over the EU's multi-annual budget 2021-2027, which were already complicated because of Brexit, are now being overshadowed by much bigger tensions that concern solidarity between the North and the South, where countries have been hit hardest by the pandemic and recovery could require substantial redistribution of the new EU budget.

Higher education in Europe is heavily affected, and it is uncertain how it will come out across Europe in the post-coronavirus period. Academic mobility is frozen, and a lot of cooperation delayed. While borders are still closed and new EU budgets for higher education and research are still undecided, it may also be time to rethink some of the established instruments, such as mobility. With our steep learning curve in online teaching and learning and Europe's Green Deal in mind, the idea of a "Green Erasmus" (more virtual mobility, or at least travel by train instead of airplane) could not be bad at all. The EU may also have to rethink its pathway or paradigm on openness. Will it have to become more realistic, more strategic? Already before the pandemic, Member States were asking the EU to level the playing field for scientific cooperation globally and to protect knowledge, data security, and research integrity against foreign interference.

Will the EU be able to globally uphold the values of an open society that underpin universities' role in society and on which academic cooperation is based? Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are stated in the European Treaty and the European Charter on Human Rights, but they are under pressure in some parts of Europe, as was illustrated in this paper. Let's not forget, the EU is after all a collection of sovereign Member States, lacking a consolidated policy in foreign affairs and with only limited competencies to act internally in research policy, and even less so in education.

A final key question for this paper is of course what the coronavirus crisis will imply for neo-nationalism and populism in Europe. During the first period after the outbreak, nationalist and populist parties have been relatively quiet, but for how long? Nationalist parties in the South may gain further support by criticizing the lack of solidarity in the recovery from the North, while nationalist trends from within China are meeting those within Europe, especially in Southern and Eastern parts of it. Nationalism could be further fueled if brain drain from the South-East to the North-West occurs in its aftermath (as was the case after the financial and Euro crises).

At the same time, the crisis does not seem to affect the support for the EU negatively. To the contrary. Eurobarometer data from 2018 cited earlier in this paper emphasized EU citizens' high levels of trust in the EU. This positive attitude was reflected in 2019 Eurobarometer data, at rates highest since 2014 and remaining higher than trust in national governments or parliaments[94]. Further evidence is found in a dedicated survey, conducted in late April 2020, which focused on citizens' attitudes towards the EU's measures to fight the Covid19 pandemic[95]. It showed that almost six out of 10 respondents are dissatisfied with the solidarity shown between EU Member States during the pandemic and nearly seven out of 10 respondents want a stronger role for the EU in fighting the crisis. Around two-thirds of respondents agree that "the EU should have more competences to deal with crises such as the Coronavirus pandemic." In responding to the pandemic, European citizens wanted the EU to focus primarily on ensuring sufficient medical supplies for all EU Member States, on allocating research funds to develop a vaccine, on direct financial support to Member States, and on improving scientific co-operation between Member States.

This last point is, of course, particularly positive and promising for the higher education sector, underlining the statement by Leiden University's rector at the end of this paper: "If history has taught us anything, it is that out of conflict comes collaboration [….] the challenges the world faces are bigger than the fights between nations and it is in everyone's best interest to work together".
The pandemic resulted in an unprecedented push for global collaboration and open science, which will hopefully not become overshadowed by competition, protectionism, and the blame-game over the origin of the virus. The EU President's successful fundraising campaign in order to secure the potential vaccine as a global public good is a great initiative in this respect.

These are signs to be optimistic indeed. Yet much will depend on forthcoming national elections. For the EU, high expectations are vested in the months to come on the statesmanship of Angela Merkel, with whose statement this paper opened. Germany will have the Presidency in the second half of 2020, a crucial period to make internal decision making a success and to strengthen the EU's global position.

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