

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: From actors to reforms in European higher education

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#### **Abstract**

In the last three decades, European higher education has experienced more reforms than in any other such (short) period in history. These reforms were accompanied and to a large extent prompted by an unprecedented degree of intergovernmental cooperation in higher education. This introductory chapter to the volume “From Actors to Reforms in European Higher Education: A Festschrift for Pavel Zgaga” presents the conceptual framework drawing on the proposition that ‘new policies create a new politics’. The chapter reviews the major reform processes in European higher education over the last 30 years and discusses some implications on the political opportunities of actors, especially students and academics. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the new wave of higher education reforms introduced by the European Strategy for Universities published by the European Commission in 2022 and raises some questions on impact of these reforms on the politics of European higher education. Finally, the chapter summarizes the contributions in this volume. Inspired by and in conversation with Pavel Zgaga’s scholarship, teaching and service, contributions in this volume explore the questions of actors and reforms in European higher education and their connections to higher education reforms beyond Europe. The contributors have a highly diverse background and include both early-career and well-established scholars and practitioners, and they come from different European regions, including Slovenia and its neighbourhoods, and beyond Europe.

#### 1.1 Reforming European higher education

In the last three decades, European higher education has experienced more reforms than in any other such (short) period in history. These reforms were accompanied and to a large extent prompted by an unprecedented degree of intergovernmental cooperation in higher education. This volume reflects on the reforms in European higher education focusing on the reform issues as well as the higher education politics enabling or accompanying these reforms.

The conceptual framework of the volume draws on the proposition that ‘new policies create a new politics’ (Schattschneider 1935) and that “policy choices are highly consequential for political life” (Hacker & Pierson 2014, 1). Higher education reforms not only influence higher education practices but shape a wide range of political forces: from the organisation and mobilisation of groups to the formation of political identities to the strategies of political actors

(Skocpol, Weir & Orloff 1989). With new policies comes ‘policy feedback’ (Pierson 1993) signalling policy objectives and policy resources, i.e., expected policy benefits or burdens. Stakeholders interpret these objectives and resources as political opportunities to pursue their specific interests. The contributions in this volume offer examples of how new higher education policies not only altered the fabric of higher education practices but have also shaped the new political opportunities for the higher education actors.

The Bologna Declaration signed by the ministers responsible for higher education paved the way towards the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with “more comparable and compatible” national higher education systems in Europe (Bologna Declaration 1999). The Bologna and the European Union “instruments”, such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Europe (ESG) have created opportunities for some actors to come onto the centre stage in European higher education polity. For example, experts behind the TUNING Educational Structures in Europe became prominent consultants on the design of study programmes, and specifically definition of learning outcomes within the EQFs. The policy focus on quality assurance gave more prominence to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and led to the establishment of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Furthermore, as Pavel Zgaga argues (2019b, 272-273) ‘the “Europeanisation” of higher education, i.e., building of the EHEA, has resulted in substantially strengthened position of students and their unions not only in the institutional governance but also in the policy making at the national and European level’ (see also Klemenčič 2012 a, b, c).

In parallel to the Bologna reforms, reforms of governance and funding of higher education have taken place with more emphasis on “adequate and sustainable incomes for universities”, “autonomy and professionalism in academic as well as managerial affairs”, “local and regional needs” and “closer cooperation between universities and enterprises” (European Commission 2003). The European Union’s Lisbon Process (Lisbon European Council 2000) with the goal for the EU “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” set the tone of these reforms. One consequence has been a stronger involvement of industry stakeholders, such as Business Europe as a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), and industry representatives in the external boards of the higher education institutions. The European Commission’s “modernisation strategy for universities” (European Commission 2003, 2005 a, b, 2006, 2008 a, b, c) influenced changes in the strategic orientations of the higher education institutions (EUA 2006).

Referred to as promoting neoliberal doctrine and academic capitalism in higher education (Slaughter and Leslie 1997), these reforms have been associated with the proletarianisation of academics in the sense of their diminishing social status and the social advantages this status implied (Halsey 1992), reconfigurations of academics’ political power within governance of their higher education institutions (Bleiklie et al. 2010), and managerial control over academics’ productivity and their academic time (Barnett 2008, see also Jamieson, Naidoo and Enders in this volume). Students’ political power in institutional governance too

has been diminished. However, unlike academics, students have also gained new political opportunities.

Even if students' representative rights might have diminished with the changing university governance structures, students have gained influence through "student voice" echoed through student experience and student engagement surveys (Bell and Brooks 2018; Zepke 2018), consumer complaint systems and signalling "consumer" preferences (Delucchi and Korgen 2002; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005; Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion 2009; Williams 2013; Tomlinson 2017; Nixon, Scullion and Hearn 2018). Furthermore, students are constructing for themselves new roles and new types of authority in quality assessment, accountability, and performance. They are taking on roles as expert evaluators in external evaluations of study programmes and institutions (Klemenčič 2015, 2018, forthcoming). Furthermore, student expert advice is called on in managerial decisions on quality, performance, and accountability (Klemenčič 2015, 2018). Finally, the liberal education reforms introducing more student-centred learning and teaching approaches are changing power relations between academics and students inside the classroom (Bunce, Baid, and Jones 2016; Hoidn and Klemenčič 2020; Klemenčič 2020). Students are gaining agency in teaching and learning, arguably curbing academics' teaching autonomy.

Since 2020, the ongoing changes in European higher education, have brought forward a new set of policy priorities and objectives. The Rome Ministerial Communiqué (2020) emphasises commitments towards the development of a more inclusive, innovative, interconnected, and resilient EHEA. The accompanying statements demonstrate the collective concerns of the present times: for academic freedom; for the social dimension of higher education; and for the enhancement of higher education learning and teaching. The attacks on academic freedoms and autonomy of higher education institutions in some countries reinforce the concerns about the diminishing democratic values and practices in European societies. Higher education institutions are affected by the actions of governments, but they also have capabilities, and indeed, responsibilities to play a civic role. The Rome Communiqué (2020) calls on higher education institutions specifically to do a service to society in educating active, critical, and responsible citizens. Enhanced quality of learning and teaching speaks to this as well as to other objectives, such as higher education's contribution to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including addressing the challenges of climate change.

At the background of the Rome Communiqué, and in fact all higher education policies since 2020 has been the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on higher education. Enabling inclusive higher education in times of crises was undoubtedly a reflection of the differentiated negative effects of the pandemic on students, especially students from underprivileged backgrounds and those enrolled at higher education institutions with fewer resources and lesser developed digital infrastructures. Digitalisation of higher education has become not only an important means of maintaining higher education operations during the pandemic, but it also enables transnational cooperation in higher education and research.

The new politics following these reforms is only just emerging. What is clear is that students, represented by the student unions and on European level by the European Students' Union (ESU) remain politically strong actors in the post-pandemic political landscape. The political clout of academic staff in European-level policy processes, however, does not appear

to strengthen. The two European associations - European University Association (EUA) representing universities and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) representing the other types of higher education institutions – remain strong political actors. Their political clout has been particularly visible in the policy processes leading up to the on the new European Strategy for Universities published by the European Commission in January 2022 (European Commission 2022a) along with the Staff Working Document (European Commission 2022b) and a Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (European Commission 2022c).

The Strategy is a non-binding policy instrument that outlines current and future policies of the European Commission and planned actions in higher education, research, and innovation within the higher education sector. The Communication is accompanied by a Staff Working Document which presents the existing European legislation, ongoing actions and initiatives and impact measures, as well as main challenges and gaps in EU actions to address these challenges. The Staff Working Document (European Commission 2022b) draws on existing literature, reports, stakeholder input and data collected by various monitoring bodies. It then offers recommendations for actions and rationales for the actions outlined in the Strategy. The Council Recommendation (European Commission 2022c) is effectively “a wish list” by the European Commission of what Member States should do at the national level to support European transnational cooperation in higher education. It lists the structural and operational issues to be addressed by the Council including some of the flagship actions proposed by the Strategy.

At the forefront of the three documents is the uniquely European approach in European Union’s investment into higher education which focuses on development of intra-European transnational cooperation in higher education (Hazelkorn and Klemenčič 2022). The major initiative highlighted in the Strategy is the Erasmus+ European Universities. Through this initiative, the European Union provides funding to alliances of European higher education institutions that commit to integrate structurally and develop deeper forms of strategic cooperation in education, research and innovation and service to society. Since 2019, through two calls, 41 such Erasmus+ European Universities were selected with 280 European higher education institutions involved. Each received up to 5 million EUR over a five-year period, and more funding is earmarked for the future. The Strategy paves the way for extending and strengthening the European Universities Initiative, and the new call has been launched in 2022.

Many of the actions mentioned in the Strategy are intended to remove barriers to successful transnational cooperation. One ongoing action that will be scaled up is the European Student Card which offers a unified form of identification to students enrolled at European higher education institutions. One of the notable new proposed actions is a European Degree. A European Degree is intended to eventually become a certificate granted to students who have obtained a joint degree from European higher education institutions partnering in transnational cooperation such as within the European Universities Initiative. In the first phase, the European Degree would be a quality label for joint study programmes which fulfil common European standards. Another proposed action is to create a legal statute for transnational alliances at the European level to support structural integration. Both initiatives are ambitious and bold steps towards bypassing the obstacles to transnational cooperation due to differences in member

states' accreditation systems and incomplete implementation of the instruments agreed within the Bologna Processes.

Overall, the Strategy is carefully aligned with the political priorities of the current Commission. It brings forward actions in higher education, research and innovation that help the European Commission reach the objectives of 1) A Europe fit for the digital age; including supporting Europe's tech and digital sovereignty, 2) A European Green Deal, 3) A new push for European democracy, 4) A stronger Europe in world, and 5) Promoting our European way of life. These objectives clearly resonate through the 50 ongoing and proposed actions listed in the Strategy. Together they testify of an ambitious European Union's agenda for higher education institutions backed by significant (over 80 billion EUR for five years period) financial commitment through the main EU's financial programmes: Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Structural Funds and InvestEU. The monitoring of the implementation and effectiveness of this investment is planned through the new European Higher Education Sector Observatory which will combine the best of existing EU data tools and develop new both for monitoring and to support evidence-based policy making in the future.

The new policies of this "higher education package" too are creating a new politics in European higher education polity. The European University alliances are becoming notable players in the European higher education arena. They will not be only recipients of EU funding but will inevitably seek to shape future policies and instruments. The European Commission has already extensively consulted them in the process of preparing the European Strategy and the Council Recommendations (European Commission 2022 ab, c). It remains to be seen whether they will be represented in European policy making by EUA and EURASHE or perhaps a new association or a network. Students from the European University alliances have already formed a separate body, a European Student Assembly. How the relationship between this body and the European Students' Union (ESU) will unfold will also be an important aspect of future European higher education politics. Given the emphasis on digital technologies in higher education, actors from ed tech industry are bound to emerge as prominent players. Similarly, actors from "green industries" focusing on higher education addressing the threats of climate change are bound to come to centre stage given the Strategy's focus on higher education supporting the European Green Deal. Similarly, new roles might open up in higher education polity for civil society actors working on protection of democratic values and for those agencies which recruit talent from third countries to Europe and promote European higher education globally.

As the 2020 EHEA implementation report (EACHEA 2020, 157) suggests, "[m]any have argued that although the Bologna Process proved to be an effective vehicle for structural reforms in its first decade, it seems to have 'run out of steam' in recent years, and is in need of a new 'vision'". Such new vision might indeed be coming from the European Commission with this package of likely most ambitious policies by the European Union so far. These reforms call for new research on European higher education, including research on the consequences of the reforms on the higher education politics in Europe. Inevitably, such research will require understanding of the past. This is what this volume has to offer.

## Contributions in this volume

This volume is dedicated to celebrating the intellectual contribution of Professor Pavel Zgaga whose work has helped advance our understanding of various aspects of higher education reforms (Zgaga 2007a, c; Zgaga et al. 2015; Zgaga 2019), reforms in his native Slovenia (Zgaga 2002, 2009b, 2010a; 2015b; 2021; Zgaga and Miklavič 2011; Komljenovic and Zgaga 2012; Klemenčič and Zgaga 2015), in the South-East Europe (Zgaga 2003a,b; 2005b; 2006d; 2009; 2010c; 2013a; 2014; 2017; Zgaga et al 2013; Klemenčič and Zgaga 2014; Waren et al. 2020), and within the Bologna Process leading towards the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Zgaga 2003b; 2003c; 2004; 2005b; 2006a; 2007a,b,c; 2012a; 2012b; 2014; 2015b; 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2020b; Weber and Zgaga 2004; Zgaga, Teichler and Brennan 2013; Branković et al. 2014). Pavel Zgaga made also notable contribution on the external dimension of the EHEA (Zgaga 2006a, 2007a, 2009b, 2012b, 2019a), as well as other topics, including on academic freedom and higher education governance (Zgaga 2002, 2006b, 2017) and wide range of other topics. As depicted in the biographical chapter written by Pavel's friend and colleague Slavko Gaber, and reinforced by several other contributions in this volume, Pavel Zgaga has not only been an important scholar investigating higher education reforms but also one of important actors in policy developments towards the reforms and their implementation.

Inspired by and in conversation with Pavel Zgaga's scholarship, teaching and service, contributions in this volume explore actors and reforms in European higher education and their connections to higher education reforms beyond Europe. The volume reflects the development of European higher education, especially the Bologna process reforms and their resonance in other parts of the world through the "external dimension" of the European higher education reform processes. It builds on the prior scholarship on the reforms within the Bologna Process which have received considerable scholarly attention (Corbett 2005, 2006; Ravinet 2005; Neave and Maassen 2007; Neave and Amaral 2008; Amaral et al 2008; Kehm 2010; Gornitzka 2010; Lažetić 2010), and especially in the threequel devoted to the study of the Bologna process (Curaj et al. 2012; Curaj et al. 2015; Curaj, Deca and Pricopie 2020). The contributions are structured into four distinct sections: (1) reforming European higher education; (2) global challenges to higher education reforms; (3) social dimension in higher education and democracy; and (4) teachers and teacher education, and academic and academic profession.

### Reforming European higher education

Liviu Matei opens this section with a discussion on "transformative thinkers and successful reformers" in European higher education. Matei makes a powerful argument that despite the undeniable existence of exceptional individuals that have driven higher education reforms, these individuals are not systematically studied by social scientists nor featured in the public imaginary associated with the reforms. Liviu Matei refers to the formidable thinkers that have developed the visions of the transformations in higher education and the innovators that have introduced "technical" instruments and initiatives that impact millions of people in higher education. Matei highlights Pavel Zgaga as one of such major reformers who had an impact on higher education reforms on many different levels. It should be added, however, that Liviu Matei too is one such formidable thinker and higher education reformer. Liviu Matei's

scholarly work on academic freedom and university governance has had unfortunate relevance to his own work as Provost of the Central European University which was effectively forced by the Hungarian government to relocate from Hungary to Austria (2019). Matei has been at the front lines fighting for the livelihood of this prominent university. The Central European University has played a tremendous role in educating social scientists in the region and continues to be a world-renowned higher education institution with global recruitment of students and staff.

Robert Waagenar too is one of those prominent higher education innovators that Liviu Matei refers to in the previous chapter. Waagenar has been one of the initiators of the impactful project “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe” (TUNING) starting in 2000. TUNING received funding from the European Commission to define and develop learning outcomes for degree study programmes. This was to help reinforce the objectives of the Bologna Process to consolidate higher education degree structures in Europe. Over time, the project developed into Tuning Academy and the Tuning methodology has been adopted by 120 countries across the world. The TUNING project has been one of the European Union’s most globally impactful instruments, and Robert Waagenar its foremost protagonist. In this volume, Waagenar puts on his scholarly hat and offers an analysis of the governance of the Bologna Process and its reforms. Waagenar argues that the emphasis in the Bologna Process shifted from policy making to policy implementation. This has resulted in reforms of the Bologna Process’s governance model to become more multi-layered and multidimensional. In his meticulous analysis, Waagenar discusses key players in the Bologna Process, their understanding of their own role and responsibilities, and their acknowledging of the new realities of and for the implementation of the Bologna objectives.

The following two chapters take us to Pavel Zgaga’s neighbourhood. Elsa Hackl, a longstanding government official in Austria and scholar of higher education at University of Vienna, offers a historical analysis of bilateral cooperation between Slovenia and Austria. In the early stages of the Bologna Process, and before Slovenia’s membership in the European Union, it was the bilateral cooperation such as the one described in this chapter that was of tremendous importance for supporting the educational reforms in Slovenia. Pavel would often speak of his interaction with Elsa which helped him navigate the new initiatives within the European Union and make plans for Slovenia’s involvement. Elsa’s systematic account of the bilateral cooperation begins with a short overview of the cooperation between the two countries before Slovenia’s independence in 1991. She continues with analysis of the cooperation after the establishment of the new independent state – the Republic of Slovenia – both bilaterally and as part of the regional cooperation networks. Elsa’s account is a powerful reminder that it is the interpersonal interactions that make the reality of the bilateral cooperation formalised in government documents and university partnership agreements. It is these day-to-day interactions between individuals, like between Elsa and Pavel, that ensure that intergovernmental and interinstitutional agreements make actual difference in the world of higher education.

Aleksa Bjeliš too can be described as one of important higher education reformers in Croatia enacted through his numerous roles, including as a rector of University of Zagreb. Aleksa’s contribution to higher education reforms transcends the borders of Croatia through his engagement with the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee on Higher Education

Research and the Council of Magna Charta Observatory. A highly regarded professor of physics, Aleksa has also been an important contributor to higher education studies especially on questions of scientific research and development, and the position and role of universities in contemporary societies and economies. It is in this area that Aleksa and Pavel found their common interests and collaborated over the years. For this volume, Aleksa prepared a highly original study on the role of constitutional courts in promoting legislative changes in higher education. Aleksa notes that in the countries that have transitioned from authoritarian to democratic systems, such as the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslav Federation, the constitutions include legislative provisions that guarantee academic freedom and university autonomy. Such provisions are rarely present in the constitutions of *Old Europe* with long democratic traditions. Aleksa specifically reflects on the constitutional developments in Croatia and Slovenia and the role of constitutional courts in the reforms of higher education.

Susan L. Robertson and Roger Dale have collaborated over many years in conceptualising and mapping the changes in education policies, education as part of state-making projects, and global and regional (higher) education cooperation projects and processes (Dale and Robertson 2002, 2008; Robertson, Bonal and Dale 2002). Joined by Kris Olds, the authors offer an admirably succinct yet comprehensive historical-political review of the higher education reforms in Europe from the establishment of a single market with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 until the present. The authors consider the present-day European developments – the rise of authoritarian populism, neo-nationalism, the 2008 financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and their ‘echoes’ in higher education. Their joint contribution in this volume reflects Pavel’s work on the external dimension strategy of the EHEA, or the ‘global echo’ as Pavel described it. Susan, Roger and Pavel were very closely involved in the Universities in the Knowledge Economy project (UNIKE; 7FP, Marie Curie), coordinated by the University of Aarhus (Professor Sue Wright), a few years ago (2013-2017).

Anne Corbett, a prominent scholar on and commentator on the higher education reforms in Europe (Corbett 2005), joins this volume with a theoretical account and a systematic empirical analysis of policymaking on the external dimension for the EHEA. Anne covers the period from 2003 to 2009 which has been the most remarkable time of policy change in this area. Her guiding questions are how the actors involved helped develop the external dimension strategy, and indeed what this specific case tells us about actorhood in higher education reforms as played out in the Bologna Process. Anne meticulously surveys the EHEA archives on the EHEA’s executive body - the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) to show individual actors’ roles, including to critically examine the role of the European Commission. In her convincing depiction of the dynamic nature of actorhood in this policy process, Anne shows how different actors have crucial impact on the policy making process at different stages. Conceptually, Anne grounds her analysis in the framing stage of the policy making process. This is also the stage in which Pavel’s notable report *Looking out: The Bologna Process in a Global Setting* (Zgaga 2006a) is of historical importance as it framed and set critical boundaries around the discussions on Bologna’s external dimension that later resulted in the external dimension strategy (Bologna Process 2007).

## Global challenges to higher education reforms

Anne Corbett's chapter links the previous section on the higher education reforms in Europe to the global context. Pavel's relevant work here includes the report on the external dimension of EHEA (Zgaga 2006a), as well as his more recent work on the global dimension (Zgaga 2019a). Of relevance is also Pavel's work on globalism as an ideology and globalisation as a process cultivated by globalism (Zgaga 2017; Zgaga & Fink-Hafner 2020). Pavel's work offers critical analyses of the macro-level educational policy developments associated with internationalisation and globalisation. He points to dichotomies and complex realities in implementing higher education policies. These emerge from differences in socio-economic, political, and historical-cultural contexts in which these education reforms are embedded as well as from competing interests, power asymmetries and divergent values for internationalisation and globalisation of higher education (Weber & Zgaga 2004; Zgaga 2006a, 2009).

The section starts with Meng-Hsuan Chou's chapter on actors and actorhood in higher education regionalisms. Hsuan is one of the foremost scholars in research on higher education regionalisms and defines them as a way to organise policy cooperation and pursue higher education reforms within world regions. Together with Pauline Ravinet they have authored several notable publications on this topic (Chou and Ravinet 2015, 2016, 2017; see also Cabanda, Tan and Chou 2019). Hsuan and Pavel collaborated in the Jean Monnet Network »Nexus of European Centres Abroad for Research on the European Higher Education Area« which resulted in several publications, including a special issue "Twenty Years of the Bologna Process - reflecting on its global strategy from the perspective of motivations and external responses" (Moscovitz and Zahavi 2019). In her chapter, Hsuan first conceptualises higher education regionalisms. Then, she analyses the case of 'European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region' (SHARE) as a case of higher education inter-regionalism between the EU and ASEAN identifying the actors and their roles. Hsuan connects her contribution to Pavel's work on the external dimension of EHEA as well as reflects on his knowledge exchange in Southeast Asia.

The chapter by Janja Komljenovic (Lancaster University; earlier, at the beginning of her doctoral studies, Janja collaborated with Pavel at the Center for Educational Studies at the University of Ljubljana) focuses on "the agents of competition and cooperation in global higher education". She offers a rigorous analysis of actorhood of various players attending the annual event and expo of the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) which is the biggest global event for institutional actors of global student mobility. Janja's chapter complements Pavel's work on macro-policy developments on international student mobility by bringing the analysis to the micro-level interactions in this NAFSA event. Janja investigates the actorhood of the attendees at the conference by analysing these attendees' social relations, capabilities, and positionalities in their interactions. Janja has made scholarly marks in several areas of higher education research, including research on higher education markets (Komljenovic 2019, Komljenovic and Robertson 2016, Robertson and Komljenovic 2016). At present, she is leading a significant research project studying the relation between the digital economy and higher education and how they might affect each other.

Sintayehu Kassaye Alemu was mentored by Pavel Zgaga while pursuing his PhD studies as part of the Marie Curie-Universities in Knowledge Economy (UNIKE) Project and

is now Associate Professor at Mekele University in Ethiopia. In his research he has focused on internationalization and academic profession as well as made important contributions on the effects of the Bologna Process's external dimension in Africa (Alemu 2019). In the contribution to this volume, Sintayehu offers a critical analysis of the diffusion of higher education reforms from the Global North to Sub-Saharan Africa. He also writes about the incremental and piecemeal adoption of the reform instruments towards regional integration within Africa. Sintayehu describes the reform actors in African higher education as well as the impact of the adopted reforms.

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić has a long career in higher education diplomacy through her service in UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES) in Bucharest, later as a Chief of Section for Higher Education in UNESCO in Paris, and now as independent consultant to UNESCO and several other international higher education players. Stamenka's and Pavel's paths crossed frequently starting in the 1990s when Pavel was working for the Slovenian government and Stamenka in UNESCO. They continued until present through the web of academic and professional higher education initiatives, networks, and events, including the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and of course the Bologna Process. As an expert on quality assurance in a global comparative perspective (Uvalić-Trumbić 2016; Uvalić-Trumbić and Martin 2020), Stamenka contributes to this volume a chapter on global reforms in quality assurance. Stamenka analyses the challenges in reforming quality assurance in higher education. She argues that these reforms are even more pressing now due to increased demand for higher education and persistent inequalities, internationalisation of higher education confronting populism and neo-nationalism, popular controversies regarding the value of and values in higher education, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it is these global developments that make the reforms of quality assurance even more challenging. In her contribution, Stamenka leads us through a discussion on the emerging global models of quality assurance in several key areas, such as student-centred learning, internationalisation, micro-credentials, social engagement and more.

In the final chapter of this section, Barbara Kehm analyses how global issues and problems in higher education are reflected in the European higher education systems. She takes us through six examples of global trends: migration, academic freedom, increasing marketization, competition and rankings, cooperation in higher education, and the COVID-19 global pandemic. Barbara is a prolific and highly accomplished scholar in higher education studies. Her research focus is on governance of and professionalisation in higher education, changes in doctoral education (Kehm 2006) and the Bologna Process, including internationalisation and mobility (Kehm and Teichler 2007). With Pavel they have interacted most recently when Barbara has been a co-editor of the Springer's International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions (Teixteira and Shin 2020) to which Pavel contributed entries on higher education systems and institutions in Slovenia (Zgaga 2017a), in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2017b), on accountability and autonomy in higher education in Eastern Europe (Zgaga 2018a), and on higher education and democratic citizenship (Zgaga 2018b).

### Social dimension in higher education and democracy

Pavel has a longstanding interest in social dimension in education. Over a period of 20 years, he has been involved in four iterations of a research project “Systemic aspects of educational strategies and encouraging of social inclusion in education” funded by Slovenian Research Agency, twice as a senior researcher and twice as principal investigator. One of his most recent publications critically tackles the questions of mobility and migration as freedom or threat within a broader discussion on inequality, innovation, and reform in higher education (Zgaga 2020b). Discussion on social dimension is featured in several Pavel’s flagship publications, including on social dimensions of the Bologna Process (Zgaga 2005a), university mission between searching for truth and commercialization (Zgaga 2007b); on eutopic dimensions of knowledge (Zgaga 2009a), education for “a better world” (Zgaga 2011), human factors of a global society (Marek et al. 2014) and inclusion in education (Zgaga 2019). Furthermore, Pavel has been deeply engaged with questions of democracy and education. Since 2013, he has been a member of the Core Group of Experts on Competences for Democratic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue within the Council of Europe. He authored and co-authored several publications on higher education and democratic citizenship (Zgaga 2009a, 2017b) and public role of the university (Biesta et al. 2009).

This section starts with Peter Scott’s “unpacking of the social dimension of universities”. Peter highlights that the European emphasis on social dimension is one of the key characteristics that distinguishes European universities from universities in more marketized higher education systems. Peter leads us through a careful depiction of the distinct yet highly interrelated aspects of ‘social dimension’. Peter Scott is one of the foremost thinkers in higher education studies and one of notable reformers of higher education. He was professor of higher education studies at University College London’s Institute of Education. He now serves as Scotland’s Commissioner for Fair Access providing impartial policy advice to the Scottish Government and other organisations and leading the system-wide effort to deliver fair access to education. Among his numerous publications, we also find some of the most highly cited works in our field, such as the co-authored book “The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies” (Gibbons et al 1994) and “Re-thinking science: Knowledge and the public in an age of uncertainty” (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons 2013).

The contribution by Zdenko Kodelja, a prominent philosopher of education in Slovenia, presents a critical discussion on a question whether the introduction of tuition fees presents a social injustice as well as a violation of international law and human rights. Zdenko takes the proposed reform of the tuition fee system in Slovenia as a starting point of his deep questioning of justifications offered by policy makers proposing introduction of tuition fees. Both philosophers of education in a small country of Slovenia, Zdenko and Pavel have been friends, friendly critics and collaborators since student years. Zdenko is a prolific writer and heads the Centre for Philosophy of Education at the Educational Research Institute, Ljubljana.

Åse Gornitzka and Peter Maassen join forces in this volume to reflect on the public responsibility of higher education as a key social institution to support and strengthen democratic culture in society. Their contribution revolves around questions of contemporary imaginaries of the role of higher education in society, how the rise of knowledge-based economy affects the democratic role of higher education, and how the democratic value of

higher education manifests itself. The authors weave into the discussion a reflection on how the COVID-19 pandemic displays the democratic value of scientific knowledge. This is a sharply argued and elegantly written chapter by two of the leading scholars in our field. They each individually and often in tandem have an impressive intellectual legacy on topics ranging from governmental policies and organisational change in higher education (Gornitzka 1999; Chou and Gornitzka 2014), hybrid steering approaches in European higher education (Gornitzka and Maassen 2000), university dynamics and European integration (Maassen and Olsen 2007), accounts of higher education policy change (Gornitzka and Maassen 2014), and many more.

The final chapter in this section is by Sjur Bergan, head of the Education Division in Council of Europe and Council of Europe's key thinker and voice on higher education reforms. Sjur Bergan has served in the Bologna Follow-Up Group since its inception until present day; the only continuous and longest-serving member of this impactful executive body of the Bologna Process. Sjur's direct input to the Bologna Process can be traced in co-authorship of many Ministerial Communiqués and serving as chair of three successive working groups on structural reforms. Sjur is also the main author of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (see also his book on qualifications Bergan 2007). Sjur has been one of the most eloquent and committed advocates for the role of education in democracy. His many speeches and writing on this topic have been collected in his monograph *Not by Bread Alone* (Bergan 2011) and many other publications (Bergan 2005; Bergan and Damian 2010). His contribution in this volume is very much "a quintessential" Sjur Bergan. The chapter introduces us to the Council of Europe's work on competences for democratic culture (CDC) as "balancing intellectual rigour and political action". Specifically, the chapter analyses the Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture developed by the Council of Europe in 2012 – 18 and the relevance of this framework for higher education.

#### Teachers and teacher education, academics, and academic profession

Teacher education has been one of the persistent and visible research topics of Pavel Zgaga. Pavel tackled this theme on three levels: 1) teacher education as a higher education study programme and as such involved in various intra-university processes and relations, 2) teacher education as an important part in development of educational policies, and 3) teacher education in international (and European) cooperation. Pavel has several notable publications in this area, such as the co-edited books on teacher education policy (Hudson and Zgaga 2008) and advancing quality cultures for teacher education (Hudson, Zgaga and Åstrand 2010) as well as several co-authored or authored publications (Zgaga 2003c, 2006, 2010b, 2013b, Hudson and Zgaga 2017). Through his government role, leadership roles within the Faculty of Education and service on the promotion commission of the University of Ljubljana, Pavel has also keenly followed the changing conditions of academic work and status of academic profession (Zgaga and Fink-Hafner 2020) and pointed also to weaknesses in the academic market in Slovenia and the prevalence in academic inbreeding (Klemenčič and Zgaga 2015).

This section begins with two chapters on teacher education written by foremost scholars on this topic. Hannele Niemi has been an immensely impactful scholar of teacher education, especially active learning in teacher education (Niemi 2002), as well as in her roles as university teacher and university leader (Vice Rector for Academic Affairs at the University of

Helsinki, 2003–2009). In her chapter, Hannele focuses on teacher education as a part of higher education which is where teacher education has been placed in most European countries and where it follows Bologna degree structures and principles. Through a policy-level perspective, Hannele discusses needed reforms in teacher education, the role of research in teacher education as well as how teacher education can fulfil its role in higher education and society.

Vasileios Symeonidis and Michael Schratz address the transformative potential of doctoral networks in teacher education. Their contribution focuses on the European Doctorate in Teacher Education (EDiTE; EU Marie Curie program), an EU-funded project in which Pavel Zgaga was also involved as a member of the Scientific Advisory Board). The authors explore the impact of the project both on participating institutions and individual participants. In his scholarly work, Michael Schratz (now Emeritus at the University of Innsbruck) also dealt considerably with the issue of the "Europeanization" of teacher education and the mobility of students - future teachers, and he also coined the term "European teacher" (Schratz 2010). An important result of his efforts was the recent implementation of the EDiTE project, in which he mentored his collaborator in this chapter, Vasileios Symeonidis (now University of Graz). The last three chapters focus on the academics and the effects that the contemporary higher education reforms have on academics. Ian Jamieson, Rajani Naidoo, and Jürgen Enders examine the changes in the position of academics in English universities since 1992 and seek to address the question of why there was not more opposition from academics to the reforms imposed onto them. Rajani Naidoo has been a key scholar in examining the "consumerist turn" in higher education (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005) and repositioning higher education as global commodity (Naidoo 2003) among many other topics. Jürgen Enders has closely analysed the changes in the academic life and work in a series of impactful publications on this topic (Enders 2005; Enders and Weert 2009). In this chapter, the three authors 'leave no stone unturned' in their deep and meticulous examination of the declining power of English academics under the neoliberal reforms.

If the reader gets distressed by the previous chapter, the one that follows by Marek Kwiek won't necessarily raise the spirits. Marek Kwiek links two ongoing trends in higher education: the vertical stratification of national higher education systems and the changing academic profession in a scenario-planning exercise. Based on data obtained from research indexing databases as well as theorization of higher education governance, funding and politics, Marek offers 20–30-year scenarios on the future reforms of higher education. Marek's scenarios depict a sharply segmented higher education sector. He predicts that there will be only a very limited number of universities that will fully combine research and teaching, and these universities will also keep a highly selective access. Majority of higher education institutions will be designed to cater to educate masses of students at relatively low cost and with masses of academics acting as university teachers. Marek Kwiek is a prolific scholar on academic profession as well as numerous other themes in higher education studies. His most cited works address globalisation and higher education (Kwiek 2001), changing higher education policies in Poland (Kwiek 2012) and the university and the state (Kwiek 2006).

The final chapter comes from a collaborative work by Alenka Flander, Sebastian Kočar, Sebastian, Bojana Čulum Ilić, Liudvika Leišytė, Sude Pekşen, and Nena Rončević who all are part of the APIKS (Academic Profession in Knowledge Societies) global network. The authors draw on the survey data to study the impact of internationalisation strategies on academics'

international research activities in the case of three “peripheral” countries: Slovenia, Croatia, and Lithuania. The authors argue that academics are crucial actors in implementing internationalisation strategies and have a certain level of authority to follow these policies or not. The differences between the three countries are pronounced both in terms of the perceived internationalisation strategies of their institutions and the emphasis that is given by the institutions to research excellence. The authors observe that these higher education systems continue to lag in internationalisation activities compared to the Western and Norden European counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

The contributions in this volume are attuned to the contemporary higher education developments, including the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic during which these contributions have been written. The contributors have a highly diverse background and include both early-career and well-established scholars and practitioners, and they come from different European regions, including Slovenia and its neighbourhoods, and beyond Europe. There are many, many other higher education scholars, and practitioners with whom Pavel closely collaborated over the years that are not included in this volume. As editor, I had to make hard choices to limit the number of contributions to fit a length of an edited volume in a *Higher Education Dynamics* book series and to create a diverse mix of authors which reflects the diversity of Pavel’s collaborators. Furthermore, while many of Pavel’s publications have been mentioned in this volume, there are also several topics that have not been highlighted, such as, for example research ethics (Zgaga 2020), research performativity (Waren et al. 2021), a historical account of higher education policies in Slovenia (Zgaga 2021), and more.

Pavel Zgaga is the father of higher education studies in Slovenia. He has been Slovenia’s strongest advocate for the pursuit of academic research into higher education and for the development of higher education studies as a field of study. Pavel is Slovenia’s most prolific, most cited, and most respected researcher into higher education. Pavel Zgaga has also been the most important advocate for the field of higher education studies to be included in the study programmes offered at the Faculty of Education at University of Ljubljana. For many generations of students, he taught courses on philosophy of education, educational policies and theoretical concepts in teacher education and educational sciences. Within the framework of the “doctoral school” which also attracts many international students, Pavel has also taught conceptualizations of the university and research space, as well as mentored many graduate students. Pavel has advocated for rigorous data collection on higher education and the development of sound data collection systems both at the governmental and institutional levels. He consistently argued that sound data collection systems are a prerequisite for sound policymaking. Pavel’s scholarship and advocacy has made him an eminent figure in higher education circles in Slovenia, neighbouring countries, and the world.

I am one of many scholars for whom Pavel has been and remains a mentor, friend, or valued colleague. The present collection of essays is a token of our esteem and appreciation.

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