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State, University and Knowledge in Greece:  
Challenges and transformations

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*Introduction: The European Higher Education Area under question.*

The University's mission as an institution is mainly the production and diffusion of knowledge. Historically in Europe, University was public (the word public often having variable meanings according to the social frame of reference). One of the key elements of its social trajectory resides in its relationship with the State and Knowledge in general. Moreover- an often forgotten fact- University was assumed as the constitution of the national elites.

Since the foundation of the University of Athens, in 1837, Greek University has performed, mainly two tasks: the preparation of civil servants

and the diffusion of knowledge, a knowledge typified in segmented departments, oriented to the training of future civil servants, especially subalterns.

As for the production of knowledge, the Greek University persistently confined to remind that its graduates were admitted by the best western universities, and to evoke sporadically its performances in certain subjects.

This situation came under question recently, especially after Greece became a member of the European Community in 1981. Adherence has accelerated the opening and internationalization through the setting of common European policies and research projects.

European policies put into question the triangular relationship of State - University-Knowledge and the challenge drifts from the State to the University. Thus gradually State's action shifted from a University model where the discovery of knowledge has been a secondary aim. Its main purpose, during the last 30 years, has been the democratization i.e. the admission of greater numbers of students, in order to follow the pace of European Policies, without success.

Within this context the Greek University became the object of strong pressure. Specifically the quest of the interdisciplinarity, one of the pillars of the European policy in the field of the research (because of the complexity of the problems nowadays and of the pressure on the instrumental character of the results of the research), defies its actual organization and functioning.

The aim of this study is to report and analyse the way in which the global financial crisis and the reformation model of the European economy seem to affect the quasi attempted reforms in the European Higher Education Area. The recent past of the Southern European countries (Castels 1995) and especially the latest developments as far as the dept crisis in Greece is concerned, are a characteristic example of the undertaken changes. Especially in the case of Greece, the reform in the area of Higher Education is not just a matter of politics and convergence with the rest of the European area of Higher Education, but also a matter of financial survival.

Thus, the analysis also focuses in the economical part of the new, social and educational reality that are being shaped under the burden of the financial crisis and the demands of the International Monetary Fund.

*The debt crisis as an EHEA<sup>1</sup> crisis.*

The subordination of European countries such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland in the support mechanism of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) redefine the terms of discussion for the EHEA and lead every research attempt on the European Higher Education to look for new starting lines of conceptualization that are no other than the area of the market. Thus, while the developments in the European sphere are rapid and critical the bibliography concerning this phenomenon is rather poor. Europe hasn't experienced similar situations in its recent modern history (Kiprianos et al 2011).

According to Altbach, Gumport and Berdahl (2011) “when most states are struggling with the already heavy burdens from medicare, medicaid state prison costs and K-12 mandatory expenses it is unrealistic to expect many states to find sufficient upturns in their economy to support the increasing costs of Higher education’ (p.2). On the other hand the social dimension does not seem to constitute a concern of the imminent reforms of EHEA. [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/2010\\_conferentie / documents/Budapest-Vienna\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/2010_conferentie/documents/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf). The relation between Market and EHEA is concerned by examining crucial parts of the Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area dated 12/3/2010 such as management, the international presence of universities, funding, social growth, academic freedom and accountability as well as the organization of studies. The *Budapest-Vienna Declaration*, is the last, up to today declaration within the frame of the Bologna Process on the European Higher Education Area, part of the Bologna process which started in 1999 and extended until 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> By the term EHEA we indicate the space where state, ultra national organizations, NGO's and interest networks of different range and force even a-typical formations and volunteering organizations, interact and create a nexus of multilevel partnership, which will have to do, among others, with the structure and operation of Higher Education.

### *Challenges and transformations: the Greek case*

Along with the steadily decreasing public funds for higher education and the emergence of new factors and changes in the social and economic surroundings in which European Higher Education operates, also diversifies Higher Education Area in Greece faces multiple challenges (Stamelos 2010, Kymourtzis 2010). According to Kymourtzis 'the expansion of higher education in Greece has signalled enormous challenges for the system while transforming the situation of the academic community (pp. 145).

From the beginning of the 19th century, Higher education in Greece, carried out four main missions: it constituted the modern Greek identity, it trained civil servants but also the dominant state elite, and finally, after the civil war (1946-1949) it was involved in the Greek division and functioned as an ideological mechanism of the prevalent political team (HEPNET, 2011).

In fact, while in Western Europe and North America the massiveness of the University takes place shortly before the II World War, in Greece it occurs place shortly after 1981. Indicatively, in the second half of the 70's less than 20% of the children of the given age group was inscribed in Tertiary education. In 2003, the relative percentage reached 65%. This increase of course doesn't mean the elimination of social inequalities. These inequalities are not expressed in the expanding admission for university but during the years of study (post graduate degrees, doctorates, post doctorates) (Sianou, 2010).

Since the end of the 20th century, a series of reforms in the Greek University were continually attempted having as an aim its larger connection with the employment market. In this framework a series of proposed reforms were also inspired by the radical change of the way that Greek University is managed. We note that in the current institutional frame the market is absent and the weight is given to the democratic participation of all the institutions of the academic community.

In the new legal framework ( <http://ypepth.opengov.gr/panaretos/?p=3364>) the administrative operation of the university detached from the state's control and connected to the notions of efficiency and effectiveness. The suggested way of

administration is signalled by the notion of “government”, that is to say participation and conflict of multiple actors and interests in the academic administration. The new objective is in obvious disharmony with the substance of government, as a notion as it is characterized by its dynamic character that has as its main trait the permanent conflict of interests. The post modern element is present with the reason of the Market in its axis (Panayiotopoulos 2001). The dominant intended operation is flexibility, the permanent inversion aiming the adjustment to the demands of the system's efficiency.

Relevant changes are introduced in financing as well. According to the current legal frame the Greek H.E.I. are subsidized by the State in order to fulfill their mission. They have the responsibility of managing the funds that derive both from government subsidy as well as their assets. Radically differentiated by the existing regulations, the relevant reforming suggestions conceptualize the financial autonomy of the Greek higher Education as financing on scheduled agreements. The academic “staff” is changed from public/state to an institutionalized one with individual employment contract agreements and a minimum guaranteed salary. Additionally, it is interesting to observe that the texts of the upcoming reform of the EHEA are not concerned with the issue of academic freedom. Thus, the question on "how to ensure academic freedom?" is not posed.

Furthermore, students are not a discernible section of the relevant texts of the suggested reform. As far as their studies are concerned, the key axis of the new developments is the subjective choice and flexibility. Therefore, study curricula are proposed with an "academic organization which facilitates freedom of mobility among various study curricula, fields of expertise and institutions of the country, with academic criteria and the possibility of attending acknowledged periods of study time in institutions abroad".

The social dimension does not seem to constitute a concern of the current reform of Higher Education in Greece. It is characteristic, according to this reform that as social dimension are reported, the forms of cooperation between the public and private sector on food and accommodation and the close connection between financing of the studies and the market by creating a student loans and scholarships system.

From the above comparative analysis we came to a series of specific remarks on EHEA. Firstly, according to the Bologna process Universities of all 47 state members should pose two main objectives: competition and attractiveness. In this framework Universities have to recognize and ensure freedom, autonomy and accountability, promoting peaceful democratic societies and enforce social cohesion and political participation. Instead, the absence of a balancing mechanism of the Market is becoming all the more tangible, since the whole procedure is evolving within the frame of a kind of political and social Darwinism. The concern is serious and was expressed in the Communiqué of Louvain in 2009.

In any case, the constitution of EHEA changes the University standards of the European states. Its aim isn't only a national society, but primarily the European area. Consequently the Greek University, as well as those of other European countries, should be considered at the same time primarily European.

*In Conclusion: restricting public financing*

The new condition in the Greek Higher Education (GHE) has not been adequately analyzed among others due to the rapid of developments. The proposals under discussion from various points, mainly from the Ministry of Education, that have been recently expressed, are a good beginning to deduct certain conclusions on the effects of the Market on the EHEA .

The current comparative analysis of the recent Greek reform proposals indicates the “anxiety” of the dept crisis and the liberal character of the new considerations. The relevant debate is characterized by gaps which, despite the express commitment of the undersigned do not lead to binding formal agreements. More concretely, the suggestions on reform tend to be an agonizing effort to drastically decrease funding in Higher Education. The operational costs of the institutions will be limited along with the proposed drastic reduction of institutions, the compaction of their regular budget (in 2009-2010, the reduction was 30%) and the unbearable shrinkage of the of public investments budget.

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