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Wie is Europa in het HO?

Eric Beerkens van de Universiteit van Sydney geeft een kritische analyse van het rapport van het CPB over de rol van Europa in het hoger onderwijs. Hij vindt de negatieve conclusie nogal kort door de bocht: "An increasing role of 'Europe' in national higher education is inevitable. The big question however is: who is 'Europe'." De neiging hier sterk insitutioneel-bestuurlijk te redeneren schiet hier tekort. Lees zijn volledige analyse [hier](#).

The Dutch Planning Agency CPB published a report on the role of Europe in higher education. More specifically, they asked the question whether there are valid reasons for more European (as opposed to national) coordination of higher education. Their final conclusion is no: there is little empirical data that supports a shift towards European coordination of higher education. The authors claim that neither economies of scale, nor the existence of external spill-overs substantially justify an increased European role.

However, looking at European developments in the last few decades, I do see that there *is* a shift from national coordination towards European coordination. Question then is of course: why does this happen? And who pushes for increased Europeanisation if there are no justified reasons for nation states to do so? Clearly, many other parties do have a stake in further Europeanisation of HE:

1. Students, Employers and Professions. Student mobility in Europe will have (indirect) consequences for national policies. Increased mobility will demand increased coordination and standardisation at the European level. One of the consequences here has been the European Credit Transfer System, standardising the credit systems in European systems. In the future, the principle of non-discrimination might well pose severe obstacles for the discretionary capacity of states to offer free higher education for their nationals. The CPB report shows that most students aren't very mobile and are not willing to go abroad to find quality education, but usually start their higher education close at home. I think however that - in due time - the European BaMa structure will lead to a substantial increase in mobility in the Masters stage, especially if the (financial) benefits of a prestigious 'foreign' Masters degree becomes more visible. With the increase in mobility of professionals there will also be more demand for standardisation and transparency in degrees and qualifications from the side of employers and of professional organisations (lawyers, medicine, accountants, etc). Simply said: increased movement and mobility leads to the necessity of coordination and facilitation of these flows. Be it flows of telephone calls or gigabytes or of students, academics, credits, services.

2. European Institutions. Many European rules have been created to coordinate and facilitate these flows. These rules were not at all related to higher education. Rulings of the European Court of Justice however, have had a substantial effect on the authority of national governments over their 'own' national higher education systems. In many instances, European law - that was not created to regulate higher education - indirectly affected higher education. Several ECJ cases in the 70s and 80s were related to education, revolving around issues like access to education for non- nationals in member states and eligibility for particular provisions and the relation with the principles of non-discrimination (for an excellent analysis, see [Verbruggen, 2002](#), in Dutch). One of the best known examples of this was the [Gravier Case](#).

Two points in the Court's ruling of the Gravier Case were relevant to the European Community's competencies in higher education. First, the ruling stated that a non-national student cannot be charged an additional fee as a condition of access if nationals of the host state do not pay the same fee. Secondly, by stating that higher education could be seen as vocational, the Court defacto extended the competencies of the Community, since vocational training was already part of the Treaty and related provisions now could also

apply to (parts of) higher education.

The principle of non-discrimination together with the rules on the free mobility of persons, workers and services increasingly impact higher education even though they were not created to do so. The growing role of the ECJ in this 'Europeanisation by stealth' is illustrated by a recent example: the [German medicine students in Austria](#). In this case, substantial national reforms can be traced back to ECJ rulings. Other national regulations on access to programmes might be proven to be counter to European law, like the case of French students applying for [Belgian programmes in veterinary science and physiotherapy](#).

3. Universities. Universities will strategically try to lift coordination to the European level whenever they see benefits for themselves; in other cases they will ally with their national governments. The 'European level' creates an extra avenue for universities in which to operate. As a response they have created a dense network of relations with other universities in order to exploit - politically or financially - their European opportunities. With more financial resources spent on European initiatives, especially fuelled by the European Lisbon Agenda promoting innovation, universities will operate and cooperate more on a European scale in order to gain access to the financial and political resources. This lifts coordination up to a European scale directly as well as indirectly. Directly through the inter-organisational coordination of activities among universities. Indirectly through the emergence of an ever denser European policy community, existing of universities, university networks, intermediary bodies, resource providers and official EU institutions.

4. The European policy community in HE. The emergence of this European policy community in higher education has become a self-reinforcing process. The informal and formal networks and the numerous European organisations active in the field of higher education have all gained a vested interest in ongoing European integration. This is clear for official European institutions like the Commission, Parliament and ECJ, but it also goes for networks and organisations like the European University Association ([EUA](#)), National Unions of Students in Europe ([ESIB](#)), European Association for International Education ([EAIIE](#)), Academic Cooperation Association ([ACA](#)), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education ([EURASHE](#)), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ([ENQA](#)), etc. or inter-university networks like [Coimbra Group](#), [ECIU](#), [LERU](#), [the Santander Group](#), [UNICA](#), and others like them.

The CPB might have found that there are not many reasons for increased European coordination. I think that this will not stop the Europeanisation process. All in all, I think an increasing role of 'Europe' in national higher education is inevitable. The big question however is: who is 'Europe'. Will the Commission and the ECJ take on the role previously performed by nation states in the coordination of higher education? Will it be an outcome of the interplay between universities, students, professions and employers? Or will it still be the member states, that are becoming more and more 'Europeanised' themselves. A mixture probably.

So, is it "time for coordination on a European level?" I think the question assumes too much agency, especially at the side of national governments. Whether it is time or not, it is happening. And it is not likely to stop.

Volg ook Beerkens' werk en onderzoek op zijn [blog](#).