

## Abstract

Drawing on sociological neo-institutional theory and models of higher education governance, we examine current developments in Bulgaria and Lithuania and explore to what extent those developments were shaped by the Bologna reform. We analyse to what extent the state has moved away from a model of state-centred policy design and control to a model of governance based on the 'evaluative state' Neave (1998), in which the state ensures 'product control' and promotes competition and quality. To do so, we look, in particular, at funding policy and the emergence of a system of quality assurance. To conclude, we examine whether the governance patterns of both countries have converged and identify the factors accounting for potential variations.

## Key words

Higher education governance, Europeanization, Bologna Process, convergence, isomorphism, Lithuania, Bulgaria

# ANALYSING THE TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN BULGARIA AND LITHUANIA

Michael Dobbins  
and Liudvika Leišytė

## Michael Dobbins

Department of Politics and Management  
University of Konstanz  
Konstanz  
Germany  
E-mail: [Michael.Dobbins@uni-konstanz.de](mailto:Michael.Dobbins@uni-konstanz.de)

## Liudvika Leišytė

Center for Higher Education Policy Studies  
University of Twente  
Enschede  
The Netherlands  
E-mail: [l.leisyte@utwente.nl](mailto:l.leisyte@utwente.nl)

## INTRODUCTION

Observers have argued that Europeanization activities in higher education (HE) may reshape national policies and lead to convergence in varying degrees (Rakic, 2001; Witte, 2006; Martens *et al.*, 2007). As a result of tightening transnational interlinkages and the consolidation of joint policy-making platforms such as the Bologna Process, it is assumed that countries will be prompted to reconfigure existing policy frameworks. Various authors (e.g. Teichler, 2005; Dobbins and Knill, 2009) have also argued that the Europeanization of HE, and most prominently the Bologna Process, may have a transformative impact on HE governance, even though the main action lines aim to transform study structures, rather than national institutional settings for HE (Musselin, 2009).

In this article, we explore current developments in HE governance in two eastern European countries – Lithuania and Bulgaria. We analyse how and to what extent developments in their patterns of HE governance were shaped by the Bologna reform and the ensuing Europeanization of the policy area. We have chosen to focus on these two particular countries for several reasons. First, both countries have received little attention in the academic literature and bear a series of important similarities. Besides similar size, both countries share a historical legacy of communism and state centrism. Second, one can argue that HE policy continuity has been more lacking in these two countries than in strongly Humboldt-oriented systems such as the Czech Republic and Poland and extremely state-centred models such as Romania, which were quick to reinstate or build on their pre-existing policy models after 1990 (Dobbins, 2011). As we show below, HE policy developments in Bulgaria and Lithuania were more volatile in the early transformation phase, making both countries potentially more susceptible to subsequent Europeanization effects.

Using empirical indicators, we trace changes in the relationship between governmental actors and universities<sup>1</sup> and examine to what extent the state has moved away from state-centred policy design towards a market-oriented governance model based on the 'evaluative state' (Neave, 1998). We look, in particular, at state regulation and funding policies as well as quality assurance (QA). Thus, we limit ourselves to dimensions of governance which directly reflect the transformation of state steering.<sup>2</sup> To conclude, we address how Bologna has affected national policy dynamics and whether patterns of governance have converged, while seeking to identify the factors accounting for variations.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The HE systems of central and eastern Europe (CEE) provide a particularly interesting case for examining the impact of Europeanization on governance. Compared to their western counterparts, post-communist HE finds itself in a volatile situation marked by

lacking historical continuity, fragile institutions, and a legacy of state centrism (Sadlak, 1995). Politics in CEE have also frequently been subject to the imposition of foreign models, e.g. from Ottoman Turkey, Austria–Hungary, Tsarist Russia, or the Soviet Union. In fact, the earliest efforts at establishing universities in CEE were based on the emulation of the original university models of Bologna and Paris (see Altbach, 1998). The subsequent historical phase was characterized by the voluntary transfer of institutions from predominant European models (the Humboldt and Napoleonic models). In the communist phase, the Soviet model of state control was coercively implanted within the existing framework (Connelly, 2001).

In the past 20 years, CEE systems have undergone a process of ‘simultaneous transition’ (Offe, 1993; Radó, 2001). Not only are they challenged by the heavy burdens with which western Europe is also struggling such as funding, academic output, and efficiency (Neave, 2003: 20), but also dilemmas particular to their socio-economic and political circumstances. Among the most crucial early post-communist challenges were the dismantling of a system of state manpower planning and the restoration of self-governance, autonomy and academic freedoms, while more recently issues regarding the proper balance between state regulation and institutional autonomy have come to the fore. At the same time, universities – as public institutions – have also been the target of broader public sector reforms aimed at decentralization, self-government, improved financial controls and preparation for EU accession (Bouckaert *et al.*, 2011).

However, CEE universities currently find themselves not only in a state of internal reform, but increasingly are also entrenched in a dynamic transnational environment framed by organizations such as the OECD, World Bank, and, in particular, the European Union (EU) (Bleiklie, 2001). The Bologna Process has emerged in this context as the most notable transnational catalyst of change. Signed in 1999 by the ministers of 29 European countries – including all CEE countries which later joined the EU – the Bologna Declaration mirrors the goals of the Sorbonne Declaration 1 year earlier: the creation of a European university space to promote mobility, transparency, and labour market qualification and the harmonization of the overarching architecture of European HE. On the surface, it has little to do with convergence or homogenization. Instead, it aims to eliminate some of the obstacles to increased student and graduate mobility by fusing degree structures into a compatible and transparent system understood.

Bologna can also be viewed as the culmination of and European answer to the knowledge economy (Corbett, 2005), demographic changes, and the impact of globalization. Unlike other Europeanized policy areas, the process is intergovernmental and exclusively rests on voluntary agreements on, e.g. harmonizing study structures (Bologna, 1999), enhancing academic mobility, increasing university autonomy, and administrative capacity (Bologna, 1999; Prague, 2001), the incorporation of students as equal partners (Berlin, 2003), and QA (Bologna, 1999; Prague, 2001). Although Bologna does not prescribe a particular model of governance, market-oriented solutions have predominated discourse and are actively promoted by the EU Commission, which has become increasingly engaged in the process (European Commission, 2003a).

For example, the Commission explicitly calls for the diversification of funding sources, intensification of university–industry ties and a closer match between the supply of qualifications and labour market demands. In other words, ‘universities have a duty to their “stakeholders” (students, public authorities, labour market and society) to maximize the social return of the investment’ (European Commission, 2003b: 14).

Despite widespread critique over its purported narrow, instrumental understanding of education in terms of economic utility,<sup>3</sup> we argue that Bologna is likely to prompt national administrations to take a more pro-active stance towards pressing HE issues and transform existing patterns of governance as well. Bearing in mind the nature of the Bologna Process as an arena for transnational policy coordination, communication, and spread of best practice, we propose *mimetic isomorphism* as a theoretical explanation for policy change, and in particular, the spread of market-oriented policies. Institutional isomorphism<sup>4</sup> (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) assumes that tight international interlinkages and communication increase the propensity of policy-makers to adopt policies viewed as more successful. Although Bologna does not explicitly call for policy homogenization, let alone governance structures, it does provide a transnational platform for comparing national HE systems. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) emphasize the importance of two other facilitating factors of isomorphism, which are inherent in the Bologna Process: legitimacy-seeking and uncertainty. First, the process radiates pressure for national systems to legitimize their policies and institutions in a competitive international environment (see Holzinger and Knill, 2005). This is facilitated by the system of benchmarking, according to which joint objectives are set based on collectively elaborated indicators. Second, they stress that situations of uncertainty can also increase the propensity of policy-makers to adopt policies perceived as more successful in order to safeguard their legitimacy amid peer scrutiny.

Both aspects – legitimacy-seeking and uncertainty – apply in great measure to CEE HE systems, making them particularly prone to isomorphic pressures. Their situation of heightened uncertainty is motivated, among other things, by the simultaneity of system transformation, decreasing education budgets, the emergence of new technology, the looming threat of brain-drain as well as the push for the expansion or consolidation of HE systems. In view of this, the Bologna Process provides a platform for lesson-drawing and the emulation of recommended policies. Thus we formulate the following expectation:

The Bologna Process and its isomorphic environment will have a reform-accelerating impact on HE governance structures in CEE, leading to increased utilization of market-oriented steering instruments.

Against this background, we by no means wish to downplay the simultaneous impact of broader public sector reforms and their potential spill-over into HE, rather assume that transnational isomorphism under the banner of Bologna is likely to add new dynamics to the reform process. To compare changes in governance in Bulgaria and Lithuania, we propose a selection of indicators for two empirically and analytically distinct HE models (1) the *state-control model* and (2) *market-oriented model*. We then look at three key areas

of HE governance that directly reflect the changing role of the state and its steering capacity: the *overall regulatory framework*, *funding policy*, and *QA*.

## Ideal-type governance models

An extreme form of the *state-control model* was prevalent in communist CEE. Here, universities are essentially state-regulated institutions (Clark, 1983; Olsen, 2009), as the state exerts control over admissions and academic profiles, often with the aim of coordinating university programmes with economic manpower. Universities are granted relatively little autonomy. As reflected in Clark's triangle of HE coordination (Clark, 1983), the role of the 'academic oligarchy' and markets is limited. The state functions as a 'guardian' (2004) and actively influences internal matters, most notably QA, efficiency, university–business relations as well as the appointment of external stakeholders (Neave and van Vught, 1991: xi–xxii). Despite trends away from this model, strong traces of its legacy can be identified in France (Kaiser, 2007), Turkey (Mizikaci, 2006), and post-communist Romania (Dobbins and Knill, 2009).

According to Olsen (2009), universities are rational instruments employed to meet national priorities. Accordingly, the state engages in *process control*, which involves the shaping or regulating the curriculum, duration of studies, access conditions, and expended resources (see Table 1). Regarding funding, state-centred systems also tend to take an *input-based approach* and link funding to indicators such as staff and student numbers. The state controls and allocates itemized funding, while institutions have little freedom to use funds at discretion, as they are frequently streamlined for state-specified objects (Jongbloed, 2003: 122). QA tends to be vested within the ministry, which focuses on the *ex ante* plausibility that an institution has the capacity to carry out a programme. The curriculum and study programmes generally follow state-prescribed guidelines (Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2004). However, this does not necessarily imply that university management is weak, but rather that it tends to be more strongly incorporated into the broader public administration. In addition, national variations of state control exist as the power of different coordinating actors within a given system is not mutually exclusive (Leisyte and Kizniene, 2006). Moreover, the complex dynamics of governance arrangements at different levels, the role of path-dependencies, changing capacities of different actors, academic oligarchy traditions as well as reform processes should not be underestimated in shaping a particular HE governance model. For example, even in state-controlled systems, such as China, certain market elements may be introduced by the state (e.g. appointment of external economic stakeholders) despite the persistence of the state-control HE paradigm.

*Market-oriented models* are based on the assumption that universities function more effectively when operating as economic enterprises (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Dill and van Vught, 2010), while entrepreneurial methods are regarded as legitimate organizational principles (see Clark, 1998). Jongbloed (2003: 113), for instance, defines

**Table 1: Two contrasting models of state steering**

	<i>State-control model</i>	<i>Market-oriented model</i>
Regulatory framework for HE		
Core decision-making unit	State	University management
State-control instruments	Manpower planning System design	Incentives for competition, quality improvements
Sets academic profiles/curriculum design	State/Academia	University management/Academia/ External Stakeholders
Sets strategic goals for HE institutions	State (with economic stakeholder participation in some countries)	University management with external Stakeholders
Sets admission conditions	State	University management
Funding		
Main funding base	State budget (university budget integral part of state budget)	Diversified (tuition/donations/research grants/private entities/state)
State funding approach	Itemized (low budgetary discretion for universities)	Lump sum (high budgetary discretion for university management)
Mode of allocation	Input-based	Output-based
Strategic investments	State defined	Multi-faceted (undertaken by university management, faculties, via spin-off companies, technology centres)
Patterns of quality control		
Who controls/evaluates?	Ministry	Accreditation/evaluation bodies (state or quasi-governmental)
What is controlled?	Academic <i>processes</i> (i.e. legal compliance and institutional capacity)	Quality of academic <i>products</i>
When does quality control take place?	<i>Ex ante</i>	<i>Ex post</i>

marketization policies as those ‘...that are aimed at strengthening student choice and liberalizing markets in order to increase quality and variety of services offered.’ In this framework, universities compete for students and financial resources. HE institutions are therefore not the result of state design, rather *entrepreneurial institutional leadership*. Ideas based on New Public Management (see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Leisyte and Kizniene, 2006; De Boer *et al.*, 2007a) and private enterprise (e.g. performance-based

funding) are supposed to foster rapid adaptation to new constraints and opportunities (Braun and Merrien, 1999; Ferlie *et al.*, 2008). High institutional autonomy enables universities to strategically design study programmes and set accession conditions. Instead of academic self-rule (see Dobbins and Knill, 2009), university management takes decisions in consultation with academic and external stakeholders, which makes HE governance more multi-lateral (Leisyte and Dee, 2012).

The predominance of market principles by no means implies the absence of the state, as the state functions as an ‘evaluator’ through quasi-governmental QA bodies (Johnson and Anderson, 1998; Neave, 1998). Instead of ‘designing’ the system, it tends to promote competition, while ensuring transparency. Hence, government involvement entails incentives for competition and quality such as performance-based funding, rather than legislative directives or manpower planning (Olsen, 2009). The state also tends to provide lump-sum funding, often at a reduced level (De Boer *et al.*, 2007b). This increases the budgetary discretion of university management, while reduced state funding makes universities financially dependent on external stakeholders such as private and business donors as well as students (see Table 1). In this way, external stakeholders and university managers are prominent actors in steering HE systems, as seen in the United Kingdom and Netherlands (e.g. the role of the Supervisory Boards/Courts and the Management Boards in university internal governance).

Following these distinctions, we break down HE systems into three dimensions of governance, which reflect the role of the state and its steering capacity: regulation, funding, and quality control.<sup>5</sup>

As shown in the table, the state-control model implies significant state intervention into university affairs, whereby the curriculum design is the result of intricate negotiations between the academia and the ministry and influenced by the manpower planning logic of the state. The state thus plays the role of the strategic visionary which regulates the student intake, university strategic investments, funding levels, and formula.

The market-oriented model, by contrast, implies the ‘off-loading’ of the state (Leisyte and Dee, 2012). Universities have high autonomy and university management has the power and legitimacy to decide on the university’s strategic direction and investments and determine its academic profile through negotiations with academics. The role of the state is thus to promote competition among the institutions and programmes and to facilitate quality improvement through ‘steering-at-a-distance’.

In the following, we trace the developments of the last 20 years in Bulgaria and Lithuania and, in view of the presented indicators, focus on whether and how Europeanization has impacted the relationship between the state and public universities. We define 2000 and 2010 as ‘benchmark years’. Clearly, it is difficult to disentangle the HE-specific effects of the Bologna Process from those of broader sector reforms in CEE, not least because the public sector reforms were to a large degree also driven by Europeanization effects and preparations for EU accession. Nevertheless, this approach enables us to determine whether Bologna and ‘soft Europeanization’ have had an accelerating impact on HE-specific governance reforms. Based on the method of process

tracing (see George and Bennett, 2005), our findings are partially derived from the comparative analysis of legislative and policy documents and secondary literature. To compensate for the relative lack of written sources, we also conducted approx. ten semi-structured interviews with HE policy-makers from both countries in order to probe the impact of transnational institutional interlinkages during the Europeanization process. The HE actors were consulted on the basis of their privileged access to policy-making and consisted of high-ranking members of ministerial departments, members of national Bologna coordination teams, university management staff involved in reform implementation (i.e. rectors, vice-rectors, heads of strategic departments) as well as representatives of intermediate institutions such as rectors' conferences and HE advisory boards.

## BULGARIA

Since the fall of communism, Bulgarian HE has been volatile and unpredictable, erratically shifting between state intervention and academic 'anarchy'. Under communism, the system constituted a hybrid of Stalinist and Napoleonic features with extreme centralization and ideological predetermination. After 1989, Bulgarian HE was initially marked by the absence of both the state and strong university management. In other words, the state essentially retracted itself from governance, leaving study and personnel issues up to individual faculties. Instead of passing a HE law, policy-makers only legally codified academic autonomy as a democratic political action to accelerate the erosion of the totalitarian system (see Boyadjieva, 2007: 112). Thus, a legal framework for governance lacked.

This led to a situation in which individual faculties sought to achieve the status of HE institutions, enabling them to collect tuition fees. Not only did the number of universities grow from five to forty, but student numbers also increased uncontrollably, despite the lack of adequate facilities and staff (Georgieva, 2002; Interview BG-1). Instead of establishing effective university management systems, academics utilized the liberal regulations to shield themselves from external control, often demonstrating rent-seeking behaviour in the procurement and management of student tuition (Boyadjieva, 2007: 113; Interview BG-2).

In response to the uncontrolled expansion of HE, the perceived decline, and lack of accountability and quality-control measures, a new Higher Education Act was adopted in late 1995 by the socialist-dominated Parliament (see Georgieva, 2002: 28). The new Act facilitated, above all, far-reaching governmental intervention into the regulatory framework for HE. This was reflected by the establishment of Uniform State Requirements developed by the ministry and a State Registry of Authorized Programmes and Fields of Study. The state requirements specified exactly what, how much, and how long a subject should be taught in a given program, while new programmes were fully dependent on the ministry's consent. Simultaneously, a



National Accreditation Institution<sup>6</sup> was established and entrusted with approving or rejecting programmes *ex ante* based on the Uniform State Requirements (Georgieva, 2002; Boyadjieva, 2007: 123).

The government also re-seized authority over student accession by prescribing universities how many students could be admitted per study course and then accordingly allocating funding.<sup>7</sup> Additional administrative responsibilities were revoked from universities, in particular with regard to financial and procedural autonomy. The new legal framework limited the autonomy of institutions to pursue income-generating activities and even eliminated taxation privileges for businesses supporting HE (Georgieva, 2002: 31). Subsequently, a State Higher Education Policy Directorate was established in order to produce long and short-term development strategies for HE providers in line with national objectives.

### **Bulgaria's rocky path towards marketization**

Considering these developments, Bulgarian HE was clearly in line with the state-control ideal-type before Europeanization effects set in. However, as an immediate signatory to the Bologna Process, Bulgaria became increasingly embedded in a pan-European framework of pressure and change. Thus, we now examine the Bologna impact and highlight how *policy emulation* and *inspiration* have become standard practice in Bulgarian HE.

The re-emergence of the state put the ministry back at the center of HE policy-making. While the shift in authority was initially motivated by the state's efforts to prevent post-totalitarian disarray, the increased steering authority also enabled the ministry to impose an overarching reform strategy from above. In fact, even before Bologna there is evidence that the ministry drew on foreign expertise to bring the system in line with perceived western European standards.

Initially, the increasing impact of transnational communication was exemplified by various rather unsuccessful attempts to implement top-down change. In the late 1990s, the ministry sought the support of the World Bank to provide guidance to its new reform course, which was intended to assure quality and stimulate competition among autonomous HE providers (World Bank, 2012; Interview BG-4). However, instead of granting university management greater autonomy, ministerial policy-makers initially sought to enforce structural modifications from above by eliminating 'superfluous' faculties and chairs (e.g. Latin studies). However, the academic community remained unreceptive to the state-driven strategy, as the state was widely perceived by academics as intervening where it should not, e.g. student numbers, structural issues (Interview BG-4).

The ministry also sought to imitate the British model of accreditation (Interview BG-6), which emphasizes the *ex post* self-evaluation, external evaluation and student opinions (see Eurydice, 2007: 103). However, disagreements persisted over programme versus institutional accreditation (Interview BG-4) so that operations only

began in 1998. This was further complicated by frequently shifting governmental coalitions and the competing objectives of the ministry in attempting to relinquish control functions without the system sliding back into disorder.<sup>8</sup>

### Did Europeanization transform Bulgarian higher education governance?

As regards Bologna, the evidence demonstrates that Europeanization has not radically transformed HE governance, but has fortified the market orientation and strongly contributed to a new steering strategy (see Table 2). The emergence of a comparative ‘transnational lens’ has compelled policy-makers to increasingly judge the viability of the system within the context of the knowledge society and in comparison with western

**Table 2: State steering in Bulgarian HE**

	2000	2010
Regulatory framework for HE		
Core decision-making unit	State	State → University management
State-control instruments	Manpower planning System design	Incentives for competition, quality improvements
Setting academic profiles/ curriculum design	State/Academia	University management/Academia (+state accreditation)
Setting strategic goals for HE institutions	State	University management
Setting access conditions & size of institution	State	State → University management + external stakeholders (via Rectors Conference)
Funding		
Main funding base	State budget (university budget integral part of state budget)	Diversified (tuition/donations/research grants/private entities/state)
State funding approach	Itemized (low budgetary discretion for universities)	Lump sum (high budgetary discretion for university management)
Mode of allocation	Input-based	Input-based → Output-based
Strategic investments	State defined	State defined → Multi-faceted
Patterns of control and quality evaluation		
Who controls/evaluates?	Ministry	National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency
What is controlled?	Academic <i>processes</i>	Quality of academic ‘ <i>products</i> ’
When does evaluation take place?	<i>Ex ante</i>	<i>Ex post</i>

systems (see Kalkanova, 2006; Interview BG-2). Lacking competitiveness, a lacking planning strategy, lacking synergies between industry and commerce, and rigid formula-based funding were increasingly viewed as untenable during the Bologna Process. The increased international scrutiny has prompted the ministry to move away from its strategy of keeping a grip on HE by means of substantive and procedural control. Instead, it now perceives itself as entrusted with the task of making HE more responsive to public needs with a more pro-active strategy. Subsequently, European ‘best practice’ has become a foundation for national action plans for converging on practices regarded as exemplary (Interviews BG-4; BG-2; BG-3).

How does this new approach match up with our empirical indicators? First, with regard to the regulatory framework, the state-centred approach has been partially replaced by a more entrepreneurial approach, best reflected in the expansion of ‘product control’ and the state’s recent efforts to promote competitive management instruments (Interview BG-6; see Table 2). Subsequently, the state has partially given back universities the autonomy taken away from them in 1995 in exchange for greater accountability, e.g. regarding academic profiles and internal structures. This is exemplified by amendments to the HE Education Act in 2002 and 2004 which set up external evaluation and control over academic affairs. Autonomy with regard to academic and research profiles has also been returned to universities, although programmes now are subject to *ex post* state accreditation. Moreover, the Bulgarian Council of Rectors has played a particularly important role in the shift towards marketization. Unlike rectors’ conferences in various other countries, which tend to represent purely academic interests (Dobbins and Knill, 2009), the Bulgarian Council of Rectors has become an interface between public and business stakeholders and HE institutions (Bulgarian Council of Rectors, 2012; Interviews BG-6; BG-3).

Nevertheless, the state has been slow to relinquish its role as a ‘system designer’ due to its continued strong oversight over admissions, institutional size, and funding. As a result, the Bulgarian case remains difficult to classify, as various market-oriented instruments are currently in a sluggish process of implementation (see Slantcheva, 2004). With regard to the size of institutions and student access conditions, Bulgaria initially has maintained a state-centred approach. The state still clings to its ‘supply-side’ reaction by stipulating accession conditions for study places in subject areas which the government deems necessary (Bekhradnia, 2004: 369). However, increasingly faced with domestic and international pressures to boost university autonomy (see Kanev, 2002; Interviews BG-1; BG-2), the ministry authorized universities in 2007 to determine the number of students and doctoral candidates – albeit dependent on the institutional capacity, which in turn is determined by means of state accreditation.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding funding, Bulgaria has also moved somewhat closer to *what is perceived* as western best practice. Purportedly inspired by British practice (Interviews BG-8; BG-6), Bulgaria abandoned its funding system based on the number of professors and introduced a system of funding per student numbers. However, it is this very input-based funding component which Great Britain has moved away from in view of rapidly increasing student

numbers (see Theisens, 2003). In other words, while Britain was shifting from input (e.g. student numbers) to output-based (i.e. performance) funding mechanisms, Bulgaria actually adopted the 'non-market' component of the British system.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Bulgaria essentially moved closer to a state-centred, input-based approach.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the ministry has attempted to peg funding to the outcome of institutional accreditation (World Bank, 2012; Interviews BG-6; BG-2). Due to implementation obstacles and the still very nascent accreditation institutions though, output-based allocation only accounts for a small fraction of state funding (less than 5 per cent). Thus, funding is still largely determined by student numbers and parliamentary lobbying by rectors, although performance-based allocation is slowly gaining traction (World Bank, 2012; Interviews BG-4; BG-6). Europeanization has also prompted Bulgaria to implement lump-sum funding (within broader state-defined guidelines) and diversify the funding base, although the latter appears to be driven more by necessity than isomorphic processes (see Table 2). Compared to other high and lower GDP countries, public expenditure for Bulgarian universities totalling 0.83 per cent of GDP is well below the OECD average (Eurostat, 2008). Nevertheless, networking with western Europe has inspired Bulgarian university managers to emancipate themselves from overdependence on state resources and search for alternative funding, with moderate success (Interview BG-3). With an average 40 per cent of funds received from non-state entities, Bulgaria is a CEE forerunner in terms of the expansion of the funding base (see Dobbins, 2011). This trend has been further reinforced by the autonomy granted to universities to levy tuition fees, which must not exceed 30 per cent of the expenses required per student per year (Sofia News Agency, 2007).

The Bologna Process has also clearly been a driving force for new QA policies. The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA), the main vehicle of networking with the EU (NEAA, 2008), has moved away from a state-serving to an output-oriented market approach, although it is institutionally still subject to government control. Previously, focus was placed on whether legal regulations were implemented in compliance with state requirements (Interview BG-1). Now accreditation is aimed at stimulating universities to establish their own output-oriented accreditation systems.<sup>12</sup> With the 2004 amendments to the HE law, Bulgaria shifted towards *ex post* accreditation based on the quality of individual programmes and their responsiveness to socio-economic demands. The agency consists primarily of leading academics appointed by the ministry, but – as an additional indicator of the emulation of western trends – the agency is increasingly relying on external stakeholder participation (see Eurydice, 2007: 103).

Referring back to our indicators, we distinguish between the circumstances in the early-Bologna phase (2000) and the post-Bologna status quo (2010). As many market-oriented policies are in a phase of implementation or experimentation, unambiguous classifications are somewhat difficult. The arrows thus reflect current shifts, i.e. policies currently in the state of implementation.

As indicated, Bulgaria has moved closer to a market-based steering model. However, it would be imprudent to pinpoint the Bologna Process as the exclusive causal factor, as

the development of the market economy itself has also influenced developments. However, by introducing an overarching platform for inspiration and adding dynamics to the system, Bologna has sustained and legitimated the reform course initiated in the late-1990s, even though various policy proposals have only fragmentarily been translated into concrete policy outcomes due to institutional fragility and lacking political continuity. Nevertheless, Europeanization has visibly contributed to the development of pro-active management and performance-oriented QA structures at the ministerial and university level and added coherence and direction to the reform pathway.

## LITHUANIA

After regaining independence in 1990, Lithuanian HE shifted between academic elite coordination and sporadic state interference. Like Bulgaria, Lithuania inherited features from the Napoleonic and Soviet models, such as the division between universities and the research institutes. Altogether, the previous system was characterized by uniform ideological education, as universities were considered an important means of political control and regime loyalty (Zelvys, 1999: 57). This was reinforced by a detailed state curriculum based on Marxism-Leninism in line with Soviet ideology and policy (Vilnius University, 1979; OECD, 2000: 167) and a uniform management apparatus that prevented the development of local autonomy (Vilnius University, 1979; Zelvys, 1999: 47).

After 1990, the system was initially centrally funded and controlled by the newly independent state. The law on Science and Higher Education (LSHE) of 1991 defined the boundaries of state regulation and granted the universities full autonomy (Leisyte and Kizniene, 2006). Lithuanian HE initially saw a slow growth of institutions and the establishment of a binary structure, while the private HE sector was not allowed until 1998. Like in Bulgaria, student numbers increased exponentially, which also was reflected in the increase of the number of colleges and private providers after 1998. HE institutions were very strong in proclaiming autonomy from the state. Due to the increase in student numbers and high demand for re-training, extra-mural courses flourished, which was a good source of funding for institutions, very often to the detriment of programme quality.<sup>13</sup>

### Western models as a reform stimulus?

To curb the deterioration in quality, the Department of Higher Education<sup>14</sup> established the Quality Assurance Agency in 1995 which started programme evaluations in 1998. The Agency borrowed heavily from European models (mainly the British and Dutch examples) and the US model while developing and legitimizing its own procedures for programme accreditation and evaluation at universities and institutional accreditation at state colleges. It actively used peer-review in evaluating study programmes and, as a

response to the Bologna Process, trained institutional evaluators, prepared methodology for institutional evaluation and liaised with the institutions while using EU structural funds after the accession to the EU. Thus, the agency has been important in regulating the programme offer via programme accreditation and more recently introduced institutional evaluation scheme. Since the HE law 2000 and following the Bologna recommendations, it has also increasingly included students and other stakeholders in programme evaluations. Through its membership in European networks of similar agencies it has actively adopted 'European good practices' in its evaluation methodologies and procedures.

After the passing of the 2009 HE law, which was legitimized largely by the European policy discourse and the Bologna Process, universities were granted more organizational and financial autonomy. Partly due to this, Quality Agency's activities were somewhat refocused towards *ex post* institutional evaluation, with the logic of programme evaluation applied to the institutional evaluation process (Interviews LT-4, LT-5; CQAHE website<sup>15</sup>). At the same time, *ex ante* evaluation of study programmes remained although institutions were given more flexibility. Thus, a mix of *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation exists, while the task of 'evaluative state' has been transferred to the universities, which now evaluate themselves and their study programmes.

### Policy change in funding

With the granting of autonomy to universities in 1990, the funding allocations officially shifted from line-item towards lump-sum schemes (Leisyte, 2002). However, the policy process was quite complex. The first attempts to introduce lump-sum payments after 1990 did not succeed due to failed negotiations over accountability procedures between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and Science (Interviews LT-2, LT-3). Amid calls for autonomy from university rectors, Lithuanian universities overcame the bureaucratic constraints and lump-sum funding was introduced in the late 1990s (Jongbloed *et al.*, 2010). The main legitimising catalyst for HE funding reform shifted from the inherited 'Soviet' central planning and budgeting model towards 'progressive western models' of HE funding (Interview LT-2). The main challenge for the state was to adjust the state bureaucratic apparatus of financing universities as public organizations within the embedded public administration system where the tone was set by the Ministry of Finance. Although funding was allocated largely based on an incremental formula, a research-performance component was gradually introduced together with a negotiated component according to how many student places the Ministry of Education and Science will fund in particular disciplines.

Most income for different types of public universities came from the state budget throughout the 1990s (Antanavicius *et al.*, 2000: 9). At that time, state allocations accounted for over 80 per cent of HE institutions' income, while industry and business funding was marginal (Leisyte, 2002). Fees from those students who could obtain state financed places or who began extra-mural studies were the main sources of additional

private income for the universities. Over the years contract income and training services became common practice at universities and colleges and made up around 10–20 per cent of university income (Interview LT-4). In 2000, the state still accounted for most of university budgets.<sup>16</sup>

In 2000, the European-inspired accountability logic of the state geared towards performance evaluation was supposed to be reflected in new funding agreements between universities and the Ministry of Education and Science. The aim of the contracts was to negotiate with universities every 3 years the demand of the number of students per discipline after the 2001 HE law.<sup>17</sup> Although the student number-based agreements were not exactly performance based, the ministry attempted to adjust the HE funding formula after 2000 to increase the performance-based component and to increase the percentage of formula based on research performance. However, academic elites, most often through the Rector's conference, managed to block quite a few attempts to drastically change the funding formula (Interview LT-1). This was partly due to lengthy university budget approval process by the Ministry of Finance, the Cabinet of Ministers, budgetary committee of the Parliament, which allowed for lobbyists to water down the output-based differentials between institutions (Leisyte and Kizniene, 2006).

After the 2000 HE law, public HE institutions were increasingly given lump-sum budgets from the government (CHEPS Consortium, 2010). Allocations to institutions were determined according to a formula, whereby 50 per cent of funds were based on historical earmarking and the remaining 50 per cent was calculated according to the increase in student numbers, demand for research and capital activities, teacher qualifications and the ratio of students per teacher (Šileika and Tamašauskienė, 2005; Lauzackas *et al.*, 2006). Since the 2009 HE law, however, funding allocations have shifted more towards a formula with a stronger mixture of input- and output-based indicators, in which research performance is becoming more important (see Table 3). Although public spending on universities remained rather low before the new law was passed – in 2008 it comprised 0.89 per cent of GDP (Eurostat, 2008) – the Minister of Education and Science and other officials in their talks in Parliament emphasized Bologna as a key driver of reforms alongside the view of universities as the main contributors to economic development. The university budgets today are global, but there are general grant headings for funds received from the government. The most important income at the discretion of institutions is contract research (e.g. substantial sums from the EU structural funds) and student fees as seen from the university yearly reports. Moreover, after the 2009 HE law introduced student vouchers, while tuition fees were sharply increased for all students varying per discipline and constitute another important source of discretionary income for universities.<sup>18</sup> The increased funding diversification of (despite little income from industry/business contracts) has meant a stronger power of the university management as well as stronger say of students, who 'vote' with their feet. Thus altogether, a slow move from the state-control to market-oriented model can be observed in Lithuania HE in the 2000s (Leisyte *et al.*, 2009) (see Table 3).

## A changing role of university management and stakeholders?

With regard to accession conditions, universities have been also exercising their autonomy since the 1990s by setting their own requirements for student admissions. With the funding of the EU, the EU PHARE HERIL project (HE Reform in Lithuania 1998–1999), which introduced a unified electronic university admissions system in

**Table 3: State steering in Lithuanian higher education**

	2000	2010
Regulatory framework for HE		
Core decision-making unit	State/University Rectors	State → University management (not only Senate, but also University Board)/External stakeholders
State-control instruments	State steering via contracts and QA	Incentives for competition, quality improvements
Setting academic profiles/curriculum design	Academia	University management/Academia (+state accreditation)
Setting strategic goals for HE institutions	Academia/University senates	University councils approve Rector's proposals/ External stakeholders/+contracts with the ministry
Setting access conditions & size of institution	Academia/University and faculty management	University management
Funding		
Main funding base	Slightly diversified (mostly state budget)	Diversified (tuition/EU and national research grants/private entities/state)
State funding approach	Lump sum (state-defined broad lines)	Lump-sum (but broad lines still indicated)
Mode of allocation	Largely input-based	Input-based → Output-based
Strategic investments	State defined	State and university management defined → Multi-faceted
Patterns of control and quality evaluation		
Who controls/evaluates?	Ministry and QA Agency	QA Agency (accreditation of study programmes and institutional evaluation)
What is controlled?	Academic <i>processes</i>	Academic <i>processes</i> and <i>products</i>
When does evaluation take place?	<i>Ex ante</i>	Mixture of <i>ex ante</i> and <i>ex post</i>



1999, gradually was adopted by an increasing number of HE institutions (Pocius *et al.*, 2001). This put Lithuanian HE in line with the market-oriented paradigm at an early stage with regard to institutional parameters.

With the 2009 HE law, the university boards were established which have decision-making powers and appoint the university rector. Despite the formal weakening of university senates, some university rectors retain their position by ensuring that university boards consist of loyal stakeholders, which basically re-appoint the previously elected rector to the same position. Hence, despite the government's wish to change the decision-making powers and to centralize them in the university board, the reality shows a mixed picture, at least for the moment.<sup>19</sup>

As shown in Table 3, the indicators reflect that Lithuania – like Bulgaria – has oscillated between both models, while the state has reassumed its role as a controller and evaluator through the QA procedures. Moreover, it influences strategic investments and student numbers in the performance contracts with the institutions and has also exercised guidance through broadly itemized university budget allocations. While in the 1990s the main legitimacy for change was the departure from the 'Soviet' model towards the Anglo-American HE model, in the late 2000s we observe Europeanization as an important source of legitimacy-building to promote HE reform.

Looking beyond the above-presented indicators, another substantial shift took place with the HE law 2009 which pushed the system even further towards the market-oriented model. The law prescribes that universities must exercise their autonomy, which was increased through the ownership of their assets and the change of the status of non-for-profit institutions. With EU funding schemes as well as increased tuition fees, the institutions have diversified their funding base and do not depend as much on state budget allocations as in 2000. Given the above factors, competition has significantly increased, and although the state still has a strong steering function, there has also been a 'discharging' of state responsibility to the university management and stakeholders.

## CONCLUSIONS

To what extent have Europeanization and the Bologna Process impacted the governance patterns of both countries? Our indicator-based ideal-types have enabled us to better distinguish between rhetorical and actual policy changes. The analysis has shown that the emulation of western policies has been a significant driving force for reform, resulting in convergence not only towards the market-oriented paradigm but also between Bulgaria and Lithuania. The increasing policy similarity is quite pronounced with regard to the shift towards a more active role and power of university management and stakeholder participation in steering universities. Nonetheless, there are notable differences between both countries, for example regarding strategic goals for HE institutions and student access requirements. The Bulgarian government seems to

have adopted a stronger state-control model in 1995, whereas in Lithuania, academia and universities have had a tighter grip over these two important regulatory mechanisms. And despite the overall transfer of power towards university management, Lithuania has more consistently aimed to increase the presence of external economic stakeholders. A similar trend also applies to QA. While both countries have heavily drawn on western European models (primarily from the UK) and justified the shift towards *ex post* evaluation with Bologna, the Lithuanian QA Agency adopted institutional evaluation mechanisms much earlier and was more active in including students in evaluation committees following the Bologna recommendations.

It would also be justified to argue that other factors not related to Bologna have been the driving forces of marketization. These include not only overarching public sector reforms, but also economic and financial problem pressures, and the development of the market economy itself. However, since approximately 2000, we have witnessed an even stronger convergence towards the market-oriented ideal-type, which lends legitimacy to the argument that Bologna and the transnational isomorphic forces which it unleashed are a strong reform catalyst. Since Bologna, institutional funding has been shifting towards performance-based, lump-sum approaches and the funding base has been increasingly diversified in both countries. While 10 years ago most of university budgets would come from the state and the biggest share of other income would be tuition fees (at least in Lithuania), funding sources now have become more diversified and include project income (especially EU structural funds), higher tuition fees (in Lithuania) and industrial/private donors funding. Such changes have provided more discretionary funds for university management to undertake strategic investments.

Altogether, both cases show that Europeanization has lent legitimacy to domestic reforms. Based on the broader indicators of policy change presented above, it appears that the pathways of both countries can be classified as a case of moderate policy convergence towards the market-oriented paradigm.<sup>20</sup> In line with our expectation, both countries have been keen to align their systems of governance with moderately market- and competition-oriented policies as well as strategies to effectively integrate external stakeholders. However, policy output in both cases was also strongly influenced by conflicting aims of state. In order to counteract quality deterioration, lacking institutional accountability, and rent-seeking during the phase of expansion and privatization, the state re-emerged as a guarantor of quality, while at the same time trying to relinquish the previous legacy of bureaucratic and procedural control. This process proved to be more painstaking and long-winding in Bulgaria, in which the state has only more recently loosened its grip over procedural affairs. Nevertheless, we have witnessed a convergence of policy goals at the rhetorical level and in actual policy output, in which the state now defines broader system objectives, while enhancing the entrepreneurial and strategic capacities of individual providers. This has resulted in a new form of steering in which the state relinquished substantive, procedural and bureaucratic control, and instead became engaged in pro-active, result-oriented, and accountability-based governance. Thus, despite the remaining patchwork of diverse

country-specific policies existing both before and after the Bologna Process began, we can speak of relative policy homogenization towards market-oriented steering practices.

## FINAL DISCUSSION

How do our findings for Lithuania and Bulgaria match up with developments in other CEE countries? Looking back at our analysis and broader findings for the region, two points stand out. First, our research and other related research has shown that the trend towards the market-oriented model has become more linear and consistent during the Bologna Process (see e.g. Kralikova, 2011 for Slovakia; Dobbins, 2011 for Romania). Across the region, the state has shifted its steering approach away from *process* to *product* control, while aiming to strengthen the institutional autonomy of HE providers. However, it is apparent that countries have embraced different instruments and approaches to recalibrate the relationship between the state and universities, consisting of a mixture of historical vestiges and externally inspired policies. Thus, while two systems may be converging towards a common overarching model, they may not necessarily become more similar to one another in terms of policy style and approaches.<sup>21</sup> In other words, our findings indicate that isomorphism induced at the transnational level comes in different shapes and can generate different results, even in a highly integrative transnational normative environment. Second, when matched up with their CEE counterparts, it is safe to say that Lithuania and Bulgaria – despite some implementation difficulties – are forerunners with regard to marketization. This leads us to assume that those countries, which drew on a stronger tradition of state steering before the Bologna Process (e.g. Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania), were more starkly affected by external internal pressures for HE marketization than those countries whose public education systems strongly re-embraced Humboldtian academic self-rule in the early transformation phase (above all Poland and the Czech Republic, see Dobbins and Knill, 2009).

As outlined above, HE reforms have taken place with the objective of making European universities more dynamic, attractive, competitive, and in tune with labour market demands. After 15 years of heavy reform activity and an increasing body of comparative research, future research should focus on whether the flurry of reforms in the context of Europeanization have reached their desired effects and done justice to the aspired ideal of a dynamic knowledge economy.

## NOTES

- 1 We explicitly focus on long-established public universities.
- 2 For more details on governance *within* universities, see De Boer *et al.* (2007a); Dobbins (2011).
- 3 For a critique of the shorter degree structures, see Labi (2009); for arguments regarding the lacking legal legitimacy of the Bologna Process, see Garben (2010a), and for the purported commercialization of higher education see Garben (2010b).

- 4 For the differences between mimetic, normative, and coercive isomorphism, see DiMaggio and Powell (1991).
- 5 The classification integrates key insights and categorizations from previous HE studies, most notably Clark (1983); Neave and van Vught (1994, 1998); Braun and Merrien (1999); Olsen (2009); Jongbloed (2003); Paradeise *et al.* (2009) and De Boer *et al.* (2007a). For a third model – the academic self-rule model (Humboldt model) – see Dobbins and Knill (2009). This model was historically less prevalent in Bulgaria and Lithuania and traces of it were eradicated during the communist era. However, academics did seek to revive elements of it in the post-communist era, but the tradition of academic self-rule in Bulgaria and Lithuania remained much weaker than in Poland and the Czech Republic, for example.
- 6 Bulgarian: *Националната агенция за оценяване и акредитация*.
- 7 In fact, the state-steering authority was not vested in the ministry, rather within the Parliament (National Assembly/*Народно събрание*) and Council of Ministers, which was entrusted with the authority to open, transform, and close faculties and HI institutions (Article 9 – HE Act of 1995).
- 8 The top managers of the agency, appointed on the basis of their knowledge foreign languages and HE systems, believed programme accreditation should prevail, while the state insisted on institutional accreditation. As a result, operations only began in 1998 (Interview BG-6).
- 9 *Закон за изменение и допълнение на закона за висшето образование* (Law to change and supplement the law on higher education).
- 10 The output component pertains to the allocation of competitively procured funds by the University Grants Commission, which have been restructured into so-called University Funding Councils (see Theisens, 2004).
- 11 The state-centred approach was reinforced by the fact that the amount of funding per university – although directly pegged to student numbers – was initially still subject to a parliamentary decision, and then itemized and controlled by the ministry. Hence, even after this change in the funding mode Bulgarian universities had little incentive to increase efficiency and performance.
- 12 This is purportedly based, above all, on British practice, which combines a mixture of self-study, student evaluations and subsequently external institutional and programme evaluation of teaching, research, and institutional capacity (Interviews BG-4; BG-1; BG-6).
- 13 The salaries of academics were low and did not increase despite increasing student number. As a result, academic teaching in up to four different HE institutions became commonplace in the 1990s.
- 14 At that time still separate from the Ministry of Education.
- 15 Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education: information available at: <http://www.skvc.lt/en/?id=0>.
- 16 For example, Vilnius University in 2000 earned 30 per cent of its income from private sources, while student fees constituted around 57 per cent of this income. Participation in the international projects and rent of premises accounted for 18 per cent, while research activities contributed 10 per cent to university the budget (Vilnius University, 2001: 1–3). The number of self-paying students constituted nearly 37 per cent of total student body at Vilnius University in 2000 (Leisyte, 2002).
- 17 The student numbers were negotiated between the universities and the Ministry of Education and Science, whereby the state would usually ‘order’ a certain number of students in specific disciplines and they would be funded by the state. Universities were free to determine the number of additional fee paying students.
- 18 Depending on the university profile the external income can make up to 75 per cent of university budgets in Lithuania today.
- 19 Moreover, the Science Council of Lithuania gained more powers by a special regulatory act in 2009, since now it is no longer only an advisory body, but a research funding body, which distributes funding (mainly EU structural funds) to HE institutions on a competitive peer-review basis. This shows that academic self-governance and power exercised through advisory bodies has not been diminished.
- 20 See Dobbins and Knill (2009) for case studies on two CEE countries – Poland and the Czech Republic – which have more strongly re-embraced Humboldtism and only sluggishly moved towards the market-oriented model. By contrast, the authors determine that Romania, which was previously an extreme case

of state-centrist HE, has also converged on the market-oriented model. This lends further legitimacy to the hypothesis that CEE countries with a strong state-centrist tradition – contrary to CEE countries with a stronger tradition of academic self-rule – have moved more swiftly towards market-oriented steering.

- 21 For the difference between ‘sigma’ and ‘delta convergence’, see Heichel *et al.* (2005). ‘Sigma convergence’ describes a decrease in policy variation between two countries or systems, whereas delta convergence refers to the minimization of distance to an ideal-type model.

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