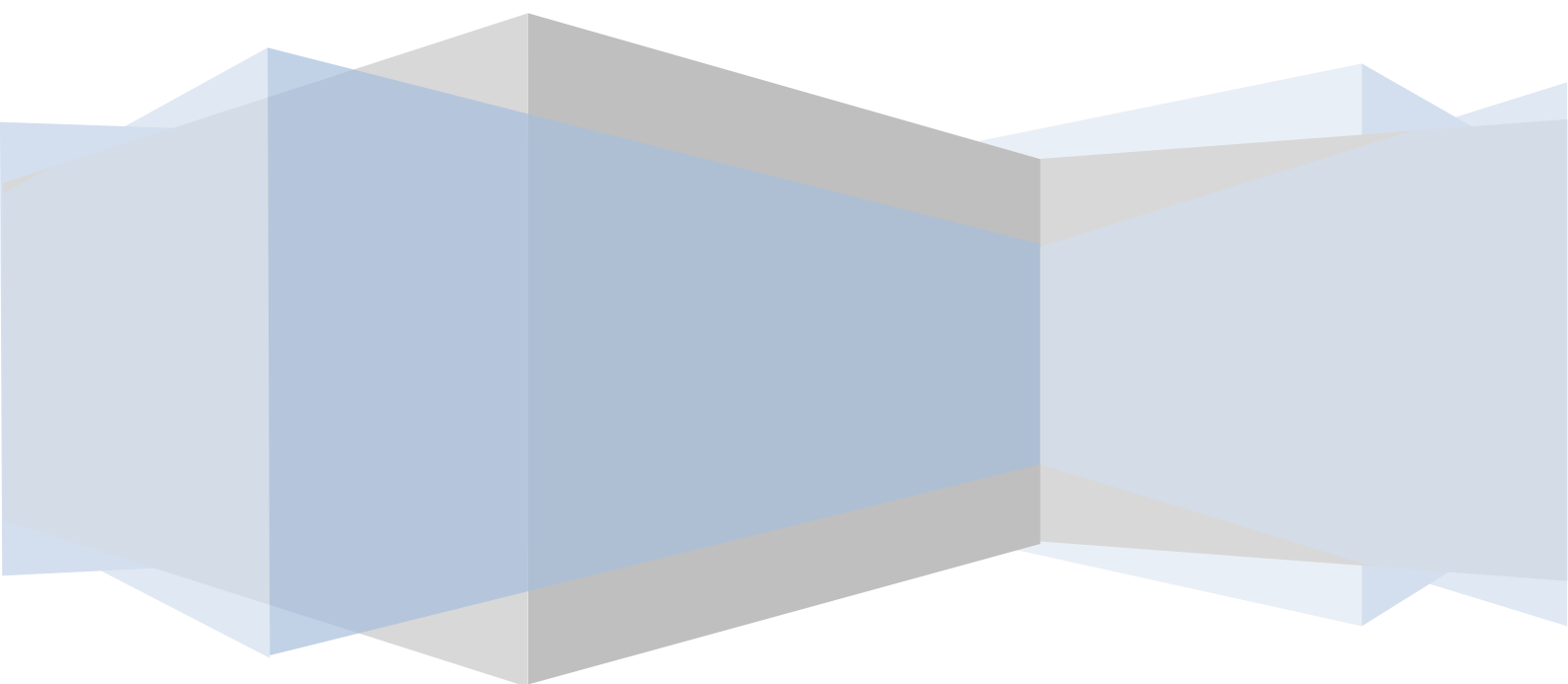


EEU Empower European Universities

Challenges for University Policy in Lithuania.

**Presentation EIB Round Table: The Future of Higher
Education, Vilnius, October 22, 2013**

Jo Ritzen, past President Maastricht University and chair EEU



“Youth! Up and over horizons rise,

And smoothly penetrate

With Thy all-seeing eyes

The nations small and great.”

So said the graduate of the Imperial University of Vilnius, the poet Adam Mickiewicz, around 1820 in his poem: “Ode to Youth”. I read this as an appeal to the University of Vilnius to provide a highly moral education. It is in any case an appeal to the duties and rights of the youth in the service of an overarching, higher ideal.



Adam Mickiewicz, around 1820.

When around 1953 I told my father, who was a teacher, about school and that we learned about the geography of the Soviet Union, he took me to his collection of stamps, showing me the tremendous diversity of countries and their national mail services which had existed before the Second World War. That’s the first time I learned about Lithuania. Then there was a vivid second time, in 1991, when Lithuania re-emerged as an independent country, after the sudden break-up of the Soviet Union.

Lithuania experienced subsequently first a substantial decline in per capita GDP. Yet from there on, Lithuania has been part of what Gill and Raiser (2012) call the “convergence” machine of the European Union, meaning that its economic growth rates are much higher than those of the richer European countries. The average per capita growth rate over the period 2000-2012 was no less than 5.9 % while that of the Netherlands or Norway (not in the EU) were slightly below 1%.

My main thesis for this panel today is that for Lithuania, like many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the next stage of convergence requires a serious overhaul of the system of higher education, with the following main components:

- Universities are driven by employability of the graduates in the broadest sense (and not by numbers only).
- Universities are empowered, financially and managerial.
- Universities are challenged to be efficient in learning.
- The system is diversified, so as to match students (potential) talents and the university offerings.

I shall briefly touch on each of these issues and lastly add a note on language.

Employability of graduates

The labor market has drastically changed in the past decades. Technology has clearly won the race from education. I use the terminology of Nobel Prize winner Jan Tinbergen who in 1975 hypothesized the race between supply of graduates and the demand from the labor market (Tinbergen, 1975). The supply increased markedly with the huge expansion of the higher education capacity leading to mass higher education, yet the demand increased faster, so that almost world- wide graduates have had a larger wage increase and lower relative unemployment than those with less education. Acemoglu (2002) suggests that it is not a race, but an upward spiral: the supply of education drove technological change, which in turn led to a greater demand for well trained graduates.

Yet under the general cloak of the increased demand for graduates there is also a shift in the types of traits graduates should have to function well in society. There is an emerging agreement among labor economists and education economists about the following set of traits that graduates need to have to function well in society (see for example Kyllonen, 2013):

- Knowledge
- Problemsolving capacity
- Communication skills
- Team work ability
- Cross cultural attitudes
- (To stay with Mickiewicz) Integrity .

This is not to say that each graduate should have exactly the same embodiment of each of these skills. There may be graduates with different sets of skills who are highly productive in goal- oriented organizations whether in the public or in the private sector (Humburg and Van de Velden, 2013).

World-wide very few universities have taken the new insight on board as guiding their learning process. This means a serious loss in effectiveness of the university education.

How to reinvent universities, to take the 21st skills as their prime output on board? Lithuania might have its own strategy. It will not be easy as educational change is perhaps among the most difficult to achieve.

Universities are empowered, financially and managerial

European continental higher education is strongly determined by Government policy including public financing. The development of a public education system with an overriding Government role has been highly beneficial for our societies. The role of Government in determining the organization and the performance of universities has been the topic of the NGO Empower European Universities. For universities especially it is clear that “empowerment” is important in realizing the goals of education, implying that the teachers and staff give the maximum of their talents in realizing student learning, in the setting of a goal oriented organizational structure. In the country ranking of the NGO Empower European Universities (Hoareau et al. 2012), Lithuania does come out as a country which can still make great strides in empowering its universities, in particular in becoming better at university research.

From the country report the following is noted:

Policy Autonomy

Lithuanian universities had in 2008 in comparison to 31 other European countries a much lower financial autonomy, a slightly lower level of policy autonomy and a higher than average organizational autonomy. The Lithuanian government has since amended the management of universities. The 2009 law on Higher education and Research redistributed the power between the Senate and the university Board. External members of the board are selected by the Lithuanian Higher Education Council and appointed by the Minister of Education and Science (the Board is composed of 9-11 members, 4-5 academics and 4-5 external members, with one student representative).

The responsibilities of appointing the Rector, strategic planning and budgeting, structural changes and other important decisions were granted to the Board, while the Senate concentrates solving only academic matters. However, in 2011, the Constitutional Court decided that the changes contradicted the principles of academic autonomy and amendments of the law were needed. Subsequently the powers of the university Senate have been restored.

We suggest that the Government might appoint smaller boards of only outside supervisors for the universities with max. 5-7 persons, as in the Danish, Dutch or Finnish structure. These persons are drawn from all sectors of life outside politics and academia and have an eminent standing in society. The supervisory board appoints the university leadership, while the university is fully independent, organizationally, financially and in terms of the curriculum content.

Funding

It is not entirely clear how much is spent per student as a percentage of per capita GDP. The available figure seems to suggest that this is a bit less than the 38.0% of the European average in 2008. Public budgets to higher education have suffered cuts since 2008.

The Lithuanian government spent 14.1% of total public expenditure tertiary education on financial aid (at a European average of 12.7%). About 45% of all the students in the country receive state funding for their studies and 55% pay the tuition fee, while a loan system for students is under discussion to help students cover the costs of these fees. The 2009 reform stressed the allocation of finances to students rather than the university, a concept called the “education backpack”, with the

notion that money should follow the student: the Government covers the costs of studies, irrespective of the type of institution (public or private) in which the student is enrolled. The Government will not cap the number of eligible students as it did in the past.

Research funding is guided by the Law on Higher Education and Research of 2009. The law aims at allocating 50% of research funding through competition between researchers (while in 2010 26% was allocated on the basis of competition).

University-performance and outputs

Education

Lithuania's graduation rates as well as the size of the student body are above the European average. Yet the percentage of foreign students was low (1.3 % with a European average of 5.9%). This includes the international students who came to Lithuania with the move of the Humanitarian University from Belarus to Vilnius in 2003.

84.8% of the graduates were employed three years after graduation in 2010. This is above the European average 82.9%. 22.4% of enrolled students graduated in 2010 (above the European average of 21.2%).

Lithuania's research performance is much below the European on all the parameters we introduced, like the presence of Lithuanian universities among the top 500 in the Jiao Tong ranking, the number of publications in top journals, the number of Marie Curie fellows, the cooperation with the private sector or the ERC wins. This is presumably related to the economic outcomes. Lithuania has – in the comparison with other countries in Europe a low level of labor productivity (a bit more than half the average level), a low percentage of knowledge workers and a corresponding low GDP per capita (one third of the average).

Our policy recommendation is then (Hoareau et al., 2012) that the ties between the ministries of education and science and that of economic affairs should be strengthened. A serious attempt should be made to bring Lithuanian research up to world standards. The latter may require considerable extra investments. We also suggest that the EU should earmark part of the cohesion and structural funds for such investments.

Universities are challenged to be efficient in learning



The MOOCs (Massive on line open courses) may be great assets to increase the efficiency in learning. However it is clear that it is indeed a revolution, not only to restructure university education

according to 21st century skills but also to use in that process MOOCs within the curriculum as blended learning or otherwise.

The system is diversified

The system is diversified, so as to match students (potential) talents and the university offerings. The massification of higher education has –in continental Europe- more or less taken place as a one size fits all, allowing for the upward aspirations of community colleges to water down the overall quality, while the traditional universities benefitted from the growth of the number of students as well. Lithuania has in this respect a major challenge, as differentiating is not easily achieved in a political environment with many constituencies which feel that they may lose out from differentiation.

Language

Europe is proud of its diversity of nations each with their distinctive culture and often with an own language. This diversity is an essential part of the European roots and needs to be preserved. At the same time we are part of one world in which we need to communicate with each other in Europe seamlessly and interact in the international world effectively. This asks for English (as the new lingua franca) at least in the master trajectories of the university as well as for some internationally oriented bachelor studies, of course building upon a good preparation of students in secondary school. Rather than spending the money in political and economic cooperation on translators we need to produce graduates who are fluent in English next to their mothertongue.



So this is where the Ode to Youth ends:

The ice so long unmoved, is bursting now

With superstitions that have dimmed the light

Hail, dawn of liberty! Oh, long live thou

Thou carriest the redeeming sun so bright.

Gratefully acknowledging comments by Prof. Giedrius Viliunas.

References

Acemoglu, Daron (2002), "Technical Change, Inequality, And The Labor Market, *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol 40(1), 7-72.

Gill, Intermit S. and Martin Raiser, 2012, "Golden Growth; Restoring the Lustre of the European Economic Model, World Bank.

Hoareau, Cecile, Jo Ritzen and Gabriele Marconi, 2012, The State of University Policy for Progress in Europe, Technical Report, Lithuania Country Report and Policy Report, website empowereu.org.

Humburg, Martin and Rolph Van der Velden, 2013, "What is expected of higher education graduates in the 21st century?" in: J. Buchanan et al. (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Skills and Training*, Oxford University Press.

Kyllonen, Patrick, 2013, Beyond the common core, ETS, 2013 (powerpoint).

Polish Poetry Free, 2007, Selected Masterpieces of Polish Poetry, translated by Jarek Zawaldski.

Tinbergen, Jan, 1975, *Income Distribution*, North Holland Publishing Company.