

Playing to lose in the international arena:

The curious case of the Bologna Process

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Abstract

This thesis discusses two cases of countries voluntarily going against their material interests at the international stage. By focusing on Albania and Lithuania, it strives to uncover the motivations for participating in the Bologna process, even when lacking the means to compete, and benefit from this policy agenda.

The Bologna Process is part of a broader paradigm shift that has transformed the way education is understood, measured and governed. It coordinates joint efforts across Europe to promote mobility, by demanding that governments remove national barriers to the free movement of students. However, although removing state protectionism in the education sector increases competition, leading to winners and losers, the losing countries have chosen to remain loyal to this cooperation, and refrain from voicing their discontent.

This behaviour does not comply with rational choice theories, which assume actors to be utility maximisers. Similarly, European integration theories do not provide compelling answers to this research puzzle. Thus, I approach it from a constructivist perspective, explaining actors' preferences from the standpoint of the 'logic of appropriate behaviour'. Furthermore, this study is process-oriented, seeking to shed light on how global agendas travel to and within national contexts. Close attention is paid to how soft governing tools are employed to manufacture consent, as well as to the path-reproducing mechanisms, which increase the costs of switching to more efficient alternatives.

Methodologically, this thesis uses Political Ethnography, which grants privileged access to the losers' worldview, allowing us to unpack how they understand and interpret their role and identity. Congruently, through a myriad of sources and a combination of research methods, such as observation, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis, I explain what motivates some nations to seek membership in the 'international society', whatever the costs.

List of abbreviations

- EU- European Union
- EC- European Commission
- OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- HE - Higher Education
- HEI – Higher Education Institution
- IO – International Organisation
- CSO- Civil Society Organisation
- MP- Member of Parliament
- PM – Prime Minister
- MP – Member of Parliament
- Minister – Minister of Education and Science
- KBE – Knowledge-Based Education
- EHEA – European Higher Education Area
- Bologna – Bologna Process
- BFUG – Bologna Follow Up Group
- WG – Working Group of the EHEA
- AG – Advisory Group of the EHEA

Country key (list of country abbreviations)

• Albania (AL) • Armenia (AM) • Azerbaijan (AZ) • Bulgaria (BG) • Croatia (HR) • Estonia (EE) • Kazakhstan (KZ) • Lithuania (LT) • Moldova (MD) • North Macedonia (MK) • Romania (RO) • Slovakia (SK)	• Austria (AT) • Belgium (BE) • Czechia (CZ) • Denmark (DK) • France (FR) • Germany (DE) • Hungary (HU) • Italy (IT) • Netherlands (NL) • Russia (RU) • Spain (ES) • Switzerland (CH) • United Kingdom (UK

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

> …the existence of the state is incompatible with the virtually costless availability of exit and with resort of citizens to it as a routine response to dissatisfaction.
>
> (Hirschman, 1978, p.104)

Introduction

This thesis focuses on cases of countries voluntarily acting against their material interest, because they are pursuing something else. It uses the lens of Europeanisation to examine idiosyncratic intergovernmental cooperation, which is developed outside of the EU framework. That is the Bologna process, which was initiated in 1998 in Paris by four ministers of education of France, Italy, Germany and the UK, and has persisted unchallenged for more than two decades, expanding to cover every country in continental Europe (except Kosovo). The focus of analysis is the underexplored relationship between the centre of Europe and the Eastern periphery in the policy domain of higher education.

I seek to contribute to the existing political science debate on the motives for states' action, by unpacking their preference to pursue an agenda that does not represent their interests, and which may even be detrimental to them. To that end, this study explores the process through which global agendas travel and get translated to the local contexts, producing new meanings, and inviting national responses. It also sheds light on the ways in which cultural resources in a national context influence the way in which actors behave. Accordingly, this study makes a series of arguments about theory, methodology and the way we should understand what is going on in world politics.

The historical background

Traditionally, education has been a distinctive policy domain within Europe, understood as an arena of national sovereignty and protected by the principle of subsidiarity (Corbett, 2005). However, the world is changing. Globalisation processes have blurred the lines between national and global spheres, and national governments are prioritising international agendas over national ones, acting as mediators of travelling policies (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). Their role has been challenged by transnational actors that engage in governance, applying new governing tools, and contributing to the emergence of a global education policy space

(Normand, 2016; Lawn & Lingard, 2001). Thus, despite resistance, the Commission's engagement with governing education in Europe has been incremental (Corbett, 2011; Pollack, 1994). Similarly, international organisations, like the OECD, have created a 'club' that feels compulsory for countries to participate in (Junemann et al., 2016; Mundy et al., 2016).

On the other hand, from the early 1990s, many countries embraced a paradigm shift in the economic functioning of societies towards the 'Economy of Knowledge' (Marginson, 2010), which required a change in the role of universities in the production, use and distribution of knowledge (see, for example, Maassen & Musselin, 2009). Congruently, governments started to use the education sector to develop their economy and compete internationally. Consequently, they seek ways to concentrate human capital, increase their revenues by exporting education services, support research and harness innovation, and increase their presence and influence globally (a.k.a. Soft Power). In this context, the mobility of students takes a central role for the economy, for it contributes to the accumulation of human capital and knowledge, which in itself is seen as a financial resource. Thus, this paradigm shift has changed the way in which education is perceived, measured and governed (see Ozga, 2019; Musselin, 2018), and has encouraged thinking about education in economic terms (Berman, 2014). Accordingly, concepts like marketisation, managerialism and performativity have taken an ever more central role (Mundy et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2016; Ball, 2008).

The Bologna Process (henceforth Bologna) is understood here as part of these developments in European higher education. This process was officially launched in 1998 in Paris. It was followed by a second conference, one year later, in Bologna where 29 countries of Europe met to adopt a common agenda on higher education. It spurred a series of substantial reforms in higher education all over Europe, in order to encourage the removal of barriers to academic mobility (i.e. students and academics) within continental Europe. This process led to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2009. Thus, through harmonisation (or, expressed more critically, standardisation) of Higher Education systems across the continent, this process encourages governments to reduce state protectionism in the education sector and allow higher intra-European competition for students.

In less than a decade, this initiative was embraced by virtually every country in continental Europe, including those lacking the means to keep up with this competition, leading to the emergence of winners and losers.

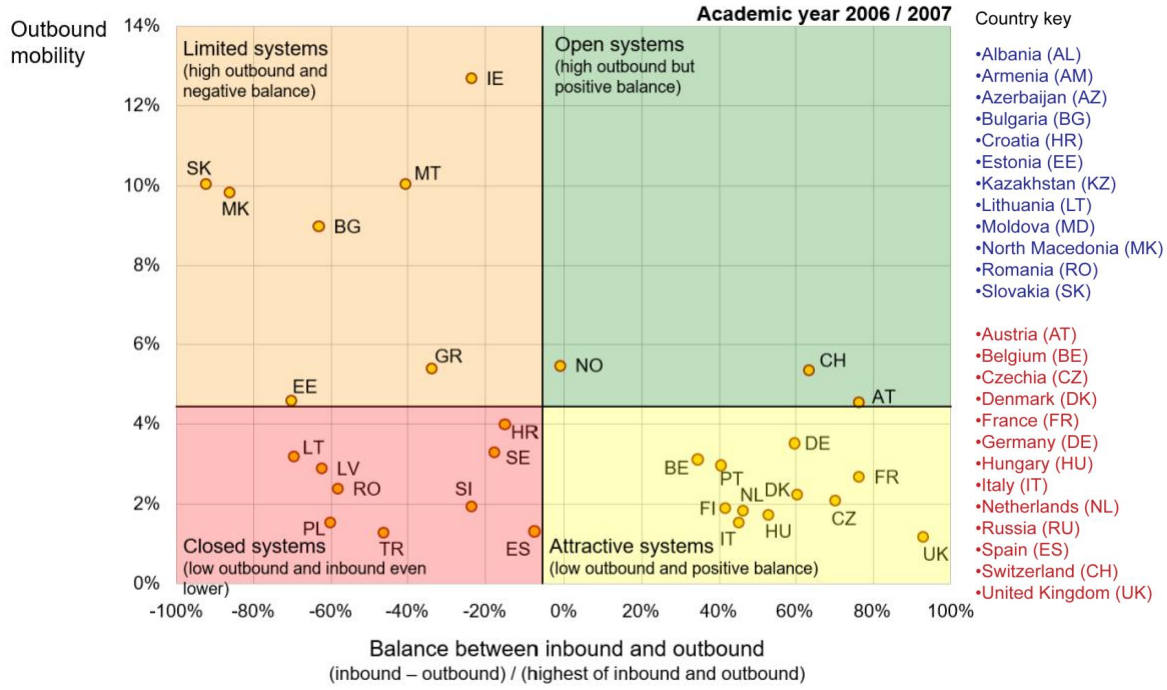


Chart 1.1. Scatter plot prepared by Eurostat experts, presented in the 4th meeting of the WG Mobility on 30.03.2011 in Berlin. **Source**: Eurostat, 2011 cited in Reis (2011)

The research puzzle

a) Winners and losers of Bologna

The aim to increase the international attractiveness of European higher education (the Bologna declaration, 1998) carries an implicit promise that the education systems of every Bologna member will become attractive too. Congruently, the discourse that legitimises this process outlines *openness* and *attractiveness* as appropriate aspirations for a model member. An illustration of this argument is given in Chart 1.1 (above), which was presented by Eurostat experts in the meetings of the Working Group on Mobility (Reis, 2011). It categorises Bologna members into four groups: (i) *Closed*, countries that have low mobility flows; (ii) *Open,* those that have high rates of both outward and inward mobility; (iii) *Attractive*, countries that have a positive net balance of student mobility; (iv) *Limited* (to avoid the word 'unattractive') those that have a negative net balance. The presentation encourages countries to avoid the 'red'

square and aspire the 'green' square of the scatterplot (see chapter 7 for an analysis of colour-coding in soft governing tools).

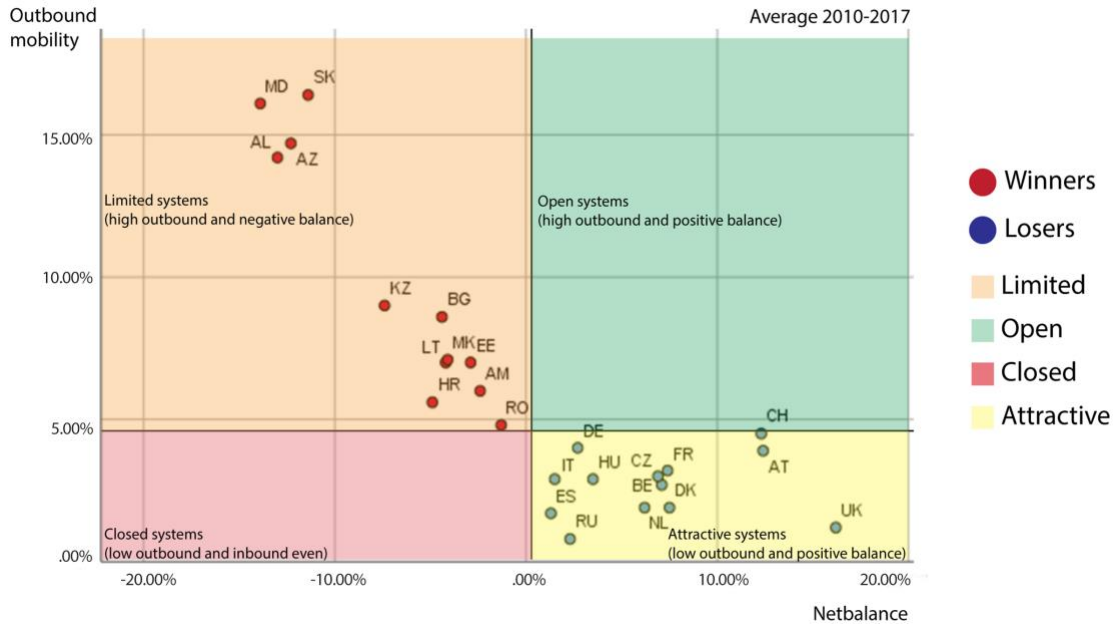


Chart 1.2: The winners (red) and the losers (blue), based on their average student mobility numbers as a percentage all domestic students (2010 – 2017). See the country code above. **Source**: UIS, 2017

However, the outcome of two decades of reforms has shown that, regardless of what it is promised implicitly or explicitly, this policy agenda does not work to the advantage of all members. Indeed, as I show in chapters 4 and 5, it may even be detrimental to some of them. Chart 1.2 (above) illustrates this argument, by showing that as the previously *closed* countries (e.g. Lithuania) 'opened up', they had a worse negative net balance, drifting into the 'limited' group. On the other hand, the "attractive" countries increased their positive net balance, becoming even more attractive, without 'opening up' enough to be in the 'green' square.

Evidence provided in chapter 4 shows that while the winners increased by sixfold their positive net balance on student mobility, the negative net balance of the losers became, in absolute numbers, 50 times worse than before joining Bologna (Unesco Institute of Statistics [UIS], 2016). These trends are confirmed even when changes in the student population size are considered. Thus, the winners went from a net balance (inflow minus outflow) of 0.4% to 7.3%, as a percentage of the student population in a country. At the same time, the losers went on from a net balance of -3.3% before Bologna to -8.1% in 2016 (UIS, 2017; OECD, 1997). [1]

[1] The OECD's mobility dataset in 1997 is much more limited, providing data only for a handful of countries.

In the Bologna documents, limited education systems, which receive fewer international students than they send abroad, are referred as *net exporting countries,* whereas those with a positive balance, as *net importing countries* (EACEA, 2015). In this study, I use the terms **winners** and **losers**[2], based on the success of countries in achieving the common goal of higher attractiveness. Given that student mobility is used as "an estimation of the attractiveness of each EHEA country" (EACEA, 2018, p.253), I refer to mobility numbers to group Bologna members into winners and losers. The losers are Eastern European countries such as Albania, Lithuania (see Chapter 3, for the full list and an analysis of common features). On the other hand, the winners are Western and Central European countries like the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and Denmark.

While the terms *winners* and *losers* are broadly used, based on the net balance of student mobility rates over the past two decades, in chapter 4, I have shown that the gains and losses go beyond the number of students, bringing social, economic and political consequences.

b) Counterfactuals

Indeed, there is a counterfactual argument that the losers might be gaining in other forms while losing students. This argument is in line with the 'brain circulation' concept and holds that high emigration is beneficial to the sending country (Tung, 2008; Saxenian, 2002). However, as I show in chapters 4 and 5, a negative net balance of student mobility has had economic, social and political ramifications for the losers. Although a brain circulation is possible in theory, in practice the significant imbalances between the losers and the winners have encouraged a one-directional flow of students, which has contributed to the concentration of human and financial capital, as well as knowledge and skills in the winning countries, depriving the losers of these resources. Consequently, despite their efforts and investment, the losers have not managed to improve the quality and the reputation of their higher education. Indeed, their education sector has worsened, experiencing a dip in demand for tertiary education, falling numbers of students and academics, massive closure of study

[2] Labels 'winners', and 'losers' should be understood only within the context of Bologna.

programs due to low enrolment rates, and universities merging as a way to avoid a shutdown. Furthermore, a combination of selective migration policies in the host countries and persistent socio-economic circumstances in the sending countries, have encouraged the majority of students from the losers to seek permanent emigration to host countries upon graduation.

The second counterfactual argument is that while the losers ended up losing from this cooperation, it does not mean that they did not hold expectations of winning when they jumped on the bandwagon (see Stein, 2008). However, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6, there is no evidence of such calculations taking place before these countries joined Bologna. Indeed, evidence shows that when the decision was taken, the incumbent ministers were very much aware of the potential ramifications of higher outward mobility and had little expectations of improving inward mobility in the near future. Moreover, even if this argument were true, it does not explain why the losing countries remain in this cooperation, not resisting or voicing grievances when the losing trend became evident.

The third counterfactual argument is that outside Bologna the losers would have been even worse off. To address this hypothesis, it is important to stress that it would be difficult to isolate Bologna's impact on student mobility flows since in this thesis it is understood as part of a broader process of higher education reform in Europe. However, the focus of this study is not assessing the impact of Bologna, but discussing its policy goals. Thus, the question is what motivates the losers to pursue a policy agenda that does not represent their material interests? Hence, the success of this agenda to achieve what it aspires is irrelevant to this question.

Having said that, latecomers to Bologna make it difficult to believe that their student net balance would have been worse outside of this cooperation. Graph 1.3 (below) shows that while outward mobility in Kazakhstan soared, the inward mobility remained stable after joining Bologna in 2010. Also, measured as a percentage of the student population, external mobility tripled from 5.2% to 14.5% in the first years of membership (Unesco, 2016).

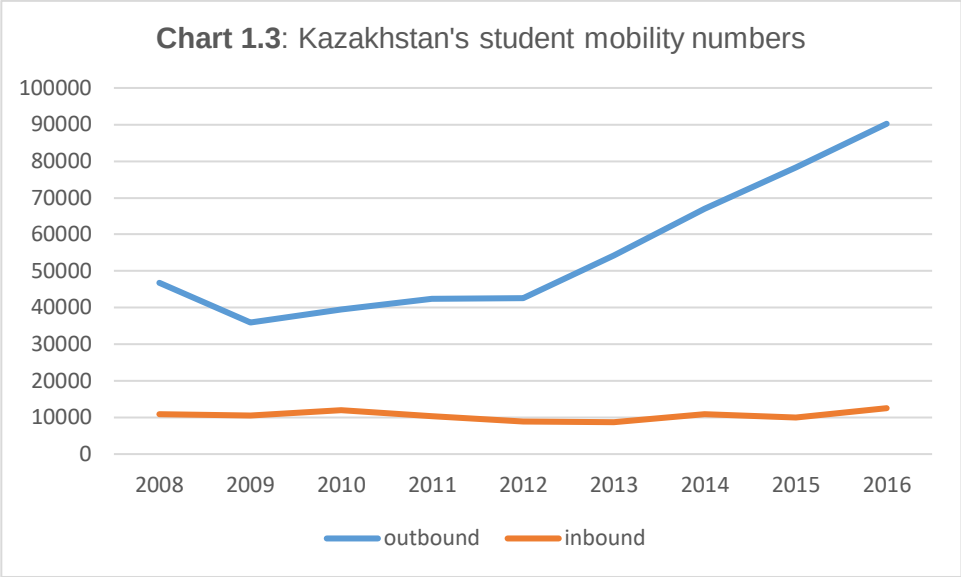


Chart 1.3: The Inbound and Outbound student mobility numbers for Kazakhstan. **Source:** UIS, 2017

Similarly, the following quotation from Bologna's implementation reports shows obstacles to mobility for fields of study that do not follow its degree structure (e.g. medicine and law):

> Countries have also reported whether some obstacles are particularly relevant for a specific field of study. The majority of states highlight persisting difficulties with recognition and inflexible curricula. For instance, particular disciplines such as medical and natural sciences, law and teaching appear to have more challenges in promoting mobility.
>
> (EACEA, 2015, p.245).

The last counterfactual argument is that the losers did not have any viable alternative to Bologna. To address that, it is essential to recognise that over the past two decades, Bologna has presented the losers with various choice nodes. A *choice node* is a point in time when actors have to decide one course of action from available alternatives (Clark et al., 2013). Thus, the losers could choose when they adopted the Bologna declaration; in Louvain in 2009 when the first deadline of Bologna was achieved, and in virtually every ministerial conference. Furthermore, since there are no formal penalties for governments to exiting this cooperation, ceasing to follow joint commitments, or even reversing its implementation, one can argue that the losers are presented with an endless number of choice nodes to change path at any time.

However, in all these moments the losers have chosen to remain loyal to Bologna, even though the following alternatives have been superior to Bologna if the losers' interests were considered from a rationalist point of view.

To begin with, the losers could have chosen to promote only *credit* mobility, while discouraging *degree* mobility. There are two types of student mobility: i) *credit* mobility, which refers to short-term education experiences abroad, and ii) *degree* mobility, which refers to travels abroad to acquire a degree (EACEA, 2018). Studies have shown that while *credit* mobility encourages 'horizontal' mobility, meaning that students move between institutions of equal academic quality, *degree* mobility tends to be 'vertical', meaning that students tend to move up to more advanced countries and institutions (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). As a corollary, *degree* mobility can be one-directional, taking the form of a zero-sum game, in which every student who is gained by the host country, is lost by the HEIs in their sending country (see chapter 5).

As discussed in chapter 4, Bologna focuses primarily on *degree* mobility, due to its importance in facilitating free movement of labour within the European market. Indeed, empirical studies have shown that Bologna has increased *degree* mobility and decreased *credit* mobility in Europe (Teichler, 2019; 2012). Thus, a better alternative for the losers has been the European Commission's program in Education, Erasmus, which focuses primarily on promoting *credit* mobility and aims at facilitating the exchange of knowledge (European Commission [EC], 2020). Indeed, as Anne Corbett (2006) explains, Bologna was initially designed as a competing project with Erasmus, which by the time Bologna was discussed, had already supported more than half-million European students to study abroad (EC, 2020a). Not only would Erasmus suffice to promote student mobility, but it was a better alternative for the losers, for the following reasons:

(i) Erasmus' outcomes were easier to anticipate, given that it had been implemented for more than a decade, while Bologna was a new project with uncertain outcomes.

(ii) Erasmus is funded by the EU and offers paid mobility opportunities. In contrast, Bologna activities are covered by national governments and studying abroad is either self-funded or supported by public funds, often issued by the sending country.

(iii) Erasmus is an EU program, and as such, it has a stronger link to EU integration. Bologna, on the other hand, is an intergovernmental project, that was initiated by four governments, and operates unrelated to the EU membership.

(iv) Erasmus promotes cooperation among European HEIs, whereas Bologna encourages international competition for students.

(v) The number of students going to study abroad through Erasmus is controlled, whereas Bologna can lead to major imbalances in student mobility. To illustrate, while through Erasmus less than 4000 Albanian students have studied abroad in more than a decade, Bologna has made it easier for 25'000 students to leave every year (Eurostat, 2017).

(vi) Erasmus relies on the work done by HEIs and therefore requires less time and resources invested by the ministry. Bologna is led by governments, and the pace of progress is set by their level of engagement and allocated resources.

(vii) Joint degrees promoted by Erasmus help the reputation of HEIs in the losing countries, because it shows that their quality of education is comparable to their European partners. The standardisation of degrees promoted by Bologna facilitates international comparison on the quality of studies (as the only remaining variable), which might have detrimental effects on the reputation of HEIs in the losing countries.

A second alternative could have been the establishment of another regional cooperation of small countries, which had a comparable level of development. As I discuss in chapter 3, the losers share common features, including geographic location, economic development, political culture, education model, and (with some exceptions) population size (World Bank, 2020c). Furthermore, some of them share a common history of cooperation under the Warsaw pact (Nato, 2020). Thus, cooperation among losers could have been more "natural" than Bologna, which has brought together many unlikely partners.

Furthermore, the Sorbonne Declaration, which set Bologna in motion, was widely criticised by small European countries who did not appreciate the "diktat" of major powers (Ravinet, 2008b; Witte et al., 2008). Hence, rather than joining cooperation that they had criticised, they could have initiated a parallel process and designed it according to their interests and preferences.

Thirdly, the losers could have delayed their membership application. Empirical evidence shows that the founding ministers of Bologna refused the European Commission's intervention, and therefore they granted it just a consultative status (Corbett, 2011; Neave, 2005). Thus, free from any pressure or incentive from the Commission, the losers could have taken more time to submit their membership application. This could have been precious time to gauge better the advantages and disadvantages of the cooperation, but also to give more time to their HEIs to prepare for the international competition induced by Bologna (See Ha Joon Chang, 2007 for a discussion on the advantages of "infant industry argument").

Finally, the losers could have acted differently once they became members of Bologna. As discussed in chapter 2, the losers could (indeed, should) have voiced their discontent, in order to increase their bargaining power, and bring its agenda in line with their national interest.

c) My research questions

Nevertheless, the losers have done none of the above. As discussed in the empirical chapters, they have chosen to embark on a process which they cannot control and pursue an agenda that is detrimental to their interests, despite having had better alternatives. Furthermore, for two decades they have shown loyalty, implementing this process enthusiastically without voicing discontent, contrary to some theoretical expectations (see for example Hirschman, 1970 “Exit, voice and loyalty”). Consequently, I address the main research question: *Why do the losers appear to voluntarily act against their material self-interest?*

I have divided it into three subsequent questions:

1. *Why did the losers join an international cooperation that cannot be beneficial to them?*
2. *Why do the losers stay in this cooperation despite evidence of losing?*
3. *Why do the losers not voice their discontent about this policy agenda?*

My theoretical approach

Bologna represents an idiosyncratic case of international cooperation, which theories of international relations have views about, and make claims, but do not provide a satisfactory explanation. Rationalist theories assume actors to be rational, utility maximisers, who are motivated by material interests. These theoretical propositions cannot explain the existence of actors who voluntarily pursue a policy agenda that does not represent and even goes against their material interests. Furthermore, they anticipate that when actors choose loyalty over exiting an organisation, they will voice their discontent, even as a strategic move, to increase their bargaining power (Moravcsik 1997; Hirschman, 1978). Nevertheless, as shown in chapter 7, the losers have chosen to refrain from voicing their discontent about this cooperation and its policy agenda.

On the other hand, theories developed to explain power relations within the EU do not quite work either, because of where Bologna is institutionally located, which is part of the Europeanisation process but developed outside of the EU framework. Furthermore, the

spillover concept of neo-functionalism explains international cooperation with reference to the efficiency of the supranational entities to solve common problems. However, they do not anticipate countries embarking on a process that does not aim to solve their problems and may even make them worse off compared to their situation before jumping on the bandwagon. Therefore, I approach this research puzzle from a different perspective, employing a series of theoretical constructs which interact with each other to provide a comprehensive explanation to my research question. I start by identifying three layers of actors: the action elite operating at the supranational level, interest groups and the policy elite operating at the subnational level, and government as a gatekeeper and a liaison between these two layers. Then, I analyse the political culture, social norms and institutional rules that shape actors' preferences and limit their actions. As I explain in the next chapter, I do not ignore actors' interests, but I do not see these interests as stable. Instead, I see interests being constructed and reconstructed in social interactions. To that end, I strive to identify actors' worldviews that are influenced through discourse to create a web of meanings that motivates appropriate actions. Moreover, this study is process-oriented, and therefore I focus on governance of this policy domain and the soft governing tools that are used to promote policy compliance. I also discuss how the dominant consensus goes unchallenged, criticism is muted, and exiting this cooperation gets removed from viable alternatives. Employing the concept of path dependence, I shed light on mechanisms that increase the costs of switching path, even when there are better alternatives to it. Congruently, I discuss the ways in which information gets filtered out through mental maps and produces positive feedback for inefficient processes, and how politicians tend to favour short-sighted solutions to long-term problems.

My methodological approach

As discussed above, I see the social, the cultural, and the historical factors as having extraordinary importance in explaining why things happen, and why states act in particular ways at the international arena. Therefore, in this study I call into question very simplified explanations of motives and behaviour, aiming to escape the trap that looks at international

cooperation from a macro-level analysis, presenting agencies and policies, and then assuming that they develop a kind of uniformity or homogeneity, without a thorough examination of the national context where these processes take shape. Hence, this study aims to provide empirical evidence on processes that often are assumed rather than empirically researched, such as the transition from government to governance.

In that vein, I approach this research puzzle from the perspective of Political Ethnography, using a wide range of resources, and methods of research, such as observation, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis. Political ethnography gives me privileged access to actors' understanding of their reality, allowing a close investigation of how national governments work in relation to these external drivers of convergence, and how actors navigate their interests in the context of competing roles and responsibilities at both the national and international level.

To that end, this study makes a methodological contribution by bringing a policy ethnography perspective to explore how actors mobilise resources, assume benefits, and operate politically in the face of a global policy agenda that is spreading across nation states, within the Europeanisation framework. As such, this study strives to deepen our understanding of why specific contexts respond in particular ways.

Outline of the study

In chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical framework that I employ to provide a plausible explanation for my research puzzle. I discuss various theoretical accounts, taking a critical perspective on rational choice theories, and emphasising their limitations in answering my research questions. I move to constructivism and theories that are underpinned by the logic of appropriate behaviour as a motivator for action or inaction.

In chapter 3, I provide in full transparency the methodological choices that I have made to answer my research questions, including my methodology, research methods, sources of evidence, and the process of data collection. I discuss the iterative process of data analysis

and highlight the measures taken to increase the validity of my research findings. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on the ethical challenges of research.

In chapter 4, I discuss whose interests this policy agenda represents, and its potential to create winners and losers. I provide empirical evidence of the economic, social and political ramifications that imbalanced mobility has had for the losers. I also discuss the costs of participating in the Bologna club, which are in addition to the costs incurred by its agenda.

In chapter 5, I focus on the two case studies, Albania and Lithuania, comparing the empirical reality observed in these countries today, and their expectations when they joined Bologna twenty years ago. I also offer an historical account, shedding light on the political, economic and social context in both countries when they decided to jump on the bandwagon of Bologna.

In chapter 6, I provide a thorough analysis of the national context that accounts for the losers' behaviour on the international stage. I unpack the policy elite of higher education in both countries and discuss the social structures where they operate. I also analyse the political culture that shapes actors' understanding and motivates action or inaction. I then discuss the ruling consensus and the ways in which it becomes unchallenged, contributing to a path-dependent process, which is underpinned by some path-reproducing mechanisms.

Chapter 7, provides an ethnographic account of the losers' behaviour on the international stage and their interaction with international partners. Here I use research vignettes to illustrate the analytical discussions made in earlier chapters, focusing on things that happen, instances, processes, events, people communicating or failing to communicate. It also focuses on the process of policy travel from the centre to the periphery, discussing ways in which national actors interact with global agendas, and give them new local meanings.

In chapter 8, I summarise my analytical discussions and bring together my theoretical framework to answer my research questions and provide a comprehensive explanation of my research puzzle. Furthermore, I draw broader conclusions and make generalisations up to the level that is allowed by my empirical findings. I conclude by emphasising the contribution of this study while identifying its limitations, which open new avenues for further research.

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2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented my research puzzle, which focuses on the unlikely cooperation of Bologna. Here, in this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework that I employ to untangle this research puzzle and to answer my main research question, which is "**Why do the losers appear to act voluntarily against their material self-interest?**". Through analysis of the behaviour of nation states using the model of "Exit, Voice and Loyalty" (Hirschman, 1970), I seek to explain why the losing countries of Bologna (henceforth the losers) have acted against expectations that might be derived from mainstream theory, choosing *loyalty* over other alternatives such as *exiting* or *voicing* their discontent.

Of course, many authors have tried to answer these questions, by looking at ideas, developing hypotheses, and doing investigative work. Therefore, in this chapter, I start by acknowledging an existing theoretical debate on what motivates states to cooperate internationally, and by discussing critically several alternative explanations that the existing body of literature offers, directly or indirectly, for the puzzles that this thesis seeks to explain. I identify gaps in the literature, which this study aims to fill, and I explain how I do that. Thus, I make assumptions and provide plausible explanations, which are tested empirically in the following chapters of this study. To that end, I have selected a series of theories and theoretical constructs, whether or not developed to explain politics, but nevertheless relevant to my research. I critically discuss these theoretical accounts, pointing to their limitations. For instance, I discuss why materialist and rationalist theories cannot answer my research puzzle (see Table Nr. 2.1, below). This leads me to approach that puzzle from a constructivist point of view, combining that perspective with other theoretical resources that enable a thorough analysis of what motivates action, how preferences are constructed, and a consensus is built; and how decisions are taken and justified. Consequently, I make a series of arguments that have broader implications (see a summary of my arguments in Table Nr.2.3, p.51).

Table Nr. 2.1. Summary of the theoretical literature (rational choice theories)	
Neo-realism	
predicts	1. Actors cooperate to maximise their material benefits 2. Interests are material or related to self-preservation (power and security) 3. Some actors are coerced to cooperate against their will 4. Members gains from cooperation are relative to their power
Fails to explain	1. The losers are not benefitting from this cooperation 2. Bologna is a voluntary process - countries (including the losers) have to apply for membership and their application can be refused 3. They are not benefiting from higher mobility, 4. There are absolute losers (losing compared to themselves before cooperation)
Bounded rationality	
predicts	1. Actor believe they will benefit from cooperation, but they are ill-informed to predict the outcome 2. They will exit if the costs of staying in outweigh the costs of leaving
Fails to explain	1. Some losers (e.g Albania and Lithuania) did foresee the losses 2. Latecomers were well-informed about the outcomes of the process 3. Wrong expectations would have encouraged exiting from cooperation
Neoliberal institutionalism	
predicts	1. International cooperation is welfare promoting, leaving all members better off 2. International institutions are powerful actors that encourage compliance 3. Countries join the club to benefit from exclusive benefits, or avoid costs of non-participation 4. States will exit if costs of staying in are higher than the costs of exiting 5. Clubs have costless exiting mechanisms
Fails to explain	1. There are losers of this cooperation 2. This is an intergovernmental process 3. This process is not exclusive, and its policies are not tied to membership; Latecomers and non-members have not paid costs of staying out 4. Path reproducing mechanisms that increase the costs of exiting
Intergovernmentalism	
predicts	1. States cooperate to advance the interests of national elites. 2. Those who benefit the most will make higher concessions 3. Countries strategically complain just to increase their bargaining power 4. International cooperation that does not benefit the whole society is not long lasting
Fails to explain	1. The losers have not been able to influence Bologna to work in their national advantage (the case of imbalanced mobility) 2. It is the losers that make higher concessions
Neo functionalism	
Predicts	1. States cooperate to tackle transnational problems and pursue common interests 2. The power of international cooperation stems from efficiency in solving common problems
Fails to explain	1. This cooperation does not represent the interests of the losers (e.g. higher outward mobility) 2. It has not solved the problems of the losers

2.2. The debate on preferences and motivation for action

A rich body of literature in political science provides different explanations of why states cooperate, which is often organised around a dichotomy between the logic of expected consequence and the logic of appropriateness (Goldmann, 2005).

As summarised in Table Nr.2.1 (above), the rational choice theories (the logic of expected consequence) assume that fully informed actors, equipped with stable preferences, will choose the alternative that will maximise their utility (Ostrom, 1998). On the other hand, according to the logic of appropriateness, actors follow the rules to respond to social situations in a way that is congruent with their identity (March and Olsen, 1989). For example, the logic of appropriateness predicts that, faced with a choice, an actor will ask "what does a person like me do in a situation like this?" (see Table Nr.2.2, p.33).

Moreover, in the rationalist approach "[c]onstitutive dynamics of social learning, socialisation, routinisation and normative diffusion, all of which address fundamental issues of agent identity and interests, are not adequately captured…" (Checkel, 1999, p.545), and therefore it has limitations in explaining what motivates choices made by political actors. The logic of appropriateness, on the other hand, does not deny that actors have interests but sees them as social constructions (Hay, 2009; Blyth, 2003).

I. The logic of consequence (Rational choice)

> If assuming rationality, states must seek to maximise their utility; anything else would be logically inconsistent…Therefore, if rationality is assumed, irrational behaviour is not allowed.
>
> (Quackenbush, 2004, p.102)

There is a number of theories that employ a rational choice approach, and all share the common assumption that actors choose alternatives that will maximise their most preferred outcomes (Quackenbush, 2004). However, this approach is criticised on the grounds that it considers political outcomes to be a result of the farsighted vision of rational actors, neglecting the often-observed short-sightedness of decision-makers (Pierson, 2004).

Furthermore, rationalists believe that actors act in their self-interest and their preferences are fixed and stable (Jones, 1999). Hence, the determination of actors' preferences is reduced to

identification of their self-interest, ignoring the shaping of behaviour by rules and identities. In other words, the rationalists assume that actors know what they want, and are very good at taking as much as they can. However, this view takes preferences as given and does not engage in explaining the way in which these preferences are formed and changed by social and historical factors (Heywood, 2013; Hay, 2009; Goldmann, 2005).

As for the nature of interests, some rationalists loosen the definition of rationality by saying that a rational actor will seek to maximise whatever they cherish in life (Quackenbush, 2004; Axelrod, 1984). However, by saying that, one is practically arguing that people will pursue whatever they will pursue. This point is taken by Fukuyama (2018) in his recent book "Identity", where he discusses the limitations of the rational choice approach to explaining what motivates people to pursue a particular course of action.

> Modern economics is based on one such theory, which is that human beings are 'rational utility maximisers': they are individuals who use their formidable cognitive abilities to benefit their self-interest. [...] To the extent that people cooperate with one another, it is because they calculate that cooperation will serve their individual self-interest better than if they act on their own. […] **The problem is that economic theory has little predictive value if preferences are not limited to something like material self-interest, such as the pursuit of income and wealth.** […] What one really needs is a theory of why some people pursue money and security, while others choose to die for a cause or to give time and money to help other people.
>
> (Fukuyama, 2018, pp: 7–13,emphasis added)

Bounded rationality

As discussed above, critics of the rational choice approach (Koch et al., 2009) argue that decisions are rarely taken rationally because often actors have limited information, problems are ill-defined, and actors tend to neglect the long-term impact of their choices. Thus, in response to that, some rationalists argue in favour of bounded rationality, which was first developed by Simon (1945). This theoretical construct maintains that actors are goal-oriented but admits that due to imperfect information or cognitive limitations, they might not manage to maximise their utility. Hence, although they may not be utility maximisers in practice, actors remain rational for they make the best choice among available alternatives (Jones, 1999).

In line with this theoretical concept, one might argue that because some countries ended up losing from the cooperation, that does not mean that they did not expect to benefit when they

initially joined (Stein, 2008). However, as compelling as this argument may be, while unrealistic expectations may explain why some signatories joined without knowing the outcomes, they do not explain the participation of late-comers – some of whom joined 17 years later – who were in a better position to understand what this policy agenda entailed, and what was its likely outcome. Neither does it explain why the losing countries remain in this cooperation, not resisting or voicing grievances when signatory ministers lost power in the losing countries. In fact, in the decades following the Bologna declaration, there were many cabinet reshuffles, with many politicians who could not be blamed for decisions taken by their predecessors. If anything, many of them could have benefitted politically by being seen to "fix" a persistent problem caused by previous governments.

a. Neo-realism

One of the main rational choice theories is neo-realism, which was preceded by realism, a theory developed to explain the cold war (Wohlforth, 2009). The four fundamental propositions of realism hold that international relations develop in anarchy, and since there is no central authority to establish order, every polity is seeking to guarantee its existence and further its interests. For realists, the nature of the gains and losses is related to material resources, power and security, and states will not refrain from exercising force to get what they want (Carr, 1946). Consequently, neo-realism would not expect states to act voluntarily against their material self-interest, and therefore it cannot explain the behaviour of the Bologna's Losers. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, while it is true that the losers have not been able to advance their material interests through Bologna policies, their participation in this cooperation has been voluntary. Indeed, many of them have been keen to go through a long and complicated application process, and accept unfavourable conditions, just to gain membership. To illustrate, Albania had to apply twice for Bologna membership, because its first application was refused (see chapter 6), whereas Belarus has been warned to implement Bologna commitments, or else lose its membership status.

Some realists, while insisting on the preference of states for maximising their utility, have developed the concept of *relative gains*, which assumes that countries are not only interested in their own gains and losses but also in those of other nations (Waltz, 1979; Grieco, 1988).

Grieco (1990) insists that state leaders assess whether cooperation will work to their national advantage, and only if it does, will they agree to cooperate and comply with it. However, he argues that for international cooperation to be Pareto-improving, it has to fulfil two conditions: to provide absolute gains to every member and provide gains relative to the nation's position in the international distribution of power.

This line of reasoning assumes that in order not to challenge the international power balance, the most powerful actors should profit most from the cooperation. In contrast, the weakest ones should gain the least. However, this argument does not imply that those weaker actors should become worse off from the cooperation. In fact, Krasner (1991) argues that although the most dominant players will end up with higher gains than the weaker ones, all members will be better off through the coordination of their policies in a specific policy domain.

Therefore, from a neo-realist perspective, we would expect the losers of Bologna to be better off from this cooperation, albeit that their gains would be relatively smaller compared to the greater powers. But the evidence shows that this is not the case. The losers are left worse off in absolute terms, which means that they are in a worse situation twenty years later than when they joined this cooperation (see chapter 5).

Furthermore, neo-realists argue that when states join international cooperation, they can control their degree of commitment and therefore withdraw at any time. They point to cases of states withdrawing from international cooperation when it conflicted with their national interest[3]. Hence, given its detrimental effects as discussed in the empirical chapters that follow, we should have seen the losers exit this cooperation, which has not happened.

[3] See Abbott and Snidal, 1998 on the USA withdrawing from the ICJ in 1984.

Another limitation of neo-realism is the narrow focus on states as units of analysis, ignoring domestic politics that shape the state's preferences in the international arena. This position is disputed by neoliberal institutionalists, who argue that "international relations have domestic roots and domestic consequences" (Stein, 2015, p.215), as discussed in the following section.

b. Neoliberal Institutionalism (New Institutionalism)

Neoliberal institutionalism was developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye as a competing theory to neorealism (Colebourne, 2012). In contrast with neo-realists, proponents of neo-liberal institutionalism argue that states cannot be coerced to act against their self-interests (Walt 1998). Furthermore, while neo-realists see international institutions as some kind of 'window dressing', they see them as vehicles for states to achieve common purposes (Clark et al., 2013; Richardson, 2008; Keohane & Nye, 1998).

However, neoliberal institutionalists share with neorealists the common assumption that actors are rational utility maximisers (Colebourne, 2012). Stein (2008) argues that states create international institutions to advance their interests, coordinate conflict or preferences and reach an equilibrium between their desired outcomes. However, the prevailing neoliberal institutionalist perspective is that international cooperation is not exploitative, but welfare promoting (Richardson, 20008; Keohane, 1989). Moreover, they argue that while institutions coordinate the interests of the states, they cannot force states to act against their own interests (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 1998). In other words, this theoretical approach would not anticipate any absolute loser emerging from international cooperation, as is the case of Bologna. On the other hand, it is argued that when international cooperation is not in the state's interest, it will exercise its power to exit (Koremenos et al., 2003). However, these theoretical expectations do not comply with the empirical reality discussed in the following chapters, where the losers have not exercised their power to *exit* from the cooperation, although it is not in line with their material interest. Hence, this theory cannot provide a satisfactory answer to my research puzzle.

Club theory

Among proponents of Neoliberal institutionalism, some authors have developed the concept of "club theory" to argue that states create exclusive groups to offer advantages to their members (see Patoski, 2006; Keohane, 2002; Cornes & Sandler, 1996). According to this view, countries want to join these clubs either to benefit from exclusive benefits of membership or to avoid the costs of non-participation (Gruber, 2000). In some cases, club membership occurs because some members have the power to act alone, and therefore change the *status-quo*, thus raising the costs for non-members to remain 'outside' (Stein, 2008; Keohane, 1984). According to this argument, although the losers might become worse off from the cooperation, they face even higher costs by staying outside "the club" (Gruber, 2000).

As discussed in chapter 4, Bologna is part of a broader international cooperation, and therefore it would be difficult to isolate its exclusive gains and losses. However, this theoretical construct cannot explain the Losers' interest in Bologna for two reasons: Firstly, in order to benefit from exclusive goods, club theory rests on the assumption that the group size should be limited, so that non-members are excluded (Cornes & Sandler, 1996). But, as discussed in the empirical chapters, it has been the intention of the Bologna founders to extend its membership to every country in Europe, and, in the recent years, even beyond Europe (see Moscovitz & Zahavi, 2019). Hence, the benefits cannot be exclusive if virtually every country in Europe is a member of this cooperation. Secondly, it is unclear what the costs of non-participation are, since latecomers did not have a worse performance outside Bologna, and in some cases, they even performed better (see Kazakhstan's case in Chapter 4).

Furthermore, proponents of this theoretical approach argue that clubs have costless exiting mechanisms, and members will remain in them as long as the benefits of membership outweigh the costs (Tschirhart & Sandler, 1997).

c. Intergovernmentalism

Liberal intergovernmentalism is another rationalist theory, developed to explain European integration. It shares with realism the view that supranational organisations, like the EU, are

“obedient servants” of the powerful states, who use them to increase the legitimacy of their interests, and share relative gains with lesser powers (Pollack, 2012; Moravcsik, 1998). However, unlike realists, proponents of this theory see the state's interests as representations of the domestic actors' interests. Moravcsik (2008), asserts that states represent the preferences of influential domestic groups, which use the state to advance interests that they would not otherwise be able to pursue. Such interests may be ideological, commercial or take other forms that represent the desire of elites to maintain their privileges. Moreover, he argues that the higher the benefits for domestic groups, the higher the demand of states to engage in transnational relations (Moravcsik, 2013). Thus, if domestic groups lack trans-border interests, states would not have any rational reason to cooperate internationally (Moravcsik, 1997).

This approach is useful in interpreting state’s preferences, as a representation of domestic groups’ interests. Consequently, we could explain the losers’ behaviour towards Bologna as a representation of the interests of a powerful elite, who manage to steer the state’s actions towards a policy that is beneficial to them. As Moravcsik puts it, international cooperation has “domestic and transnational distributional implications, which almost invariably create winners and losers.” (Moravcsik, 2008, p.237). Congruently, studies have shown that in most of the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, national elites have been influential in controlling the implementation of international agendas in the national context (Ekiert et al., 2007).

However, unlike institutionalists or neo-functionalists (see below), intergovernmentalists argue that governments exert full control over international cooperation, keeping it in line with their national agenda (Moravcsik, 2004). This point of view is very much focused on the role played by powerful EU members, and therefore misses the perspective of the periphery of Europe. For instance, we see in the empirical chapters that the losers of Bologna have not been able to use this cooperation to their national advantage.

Secondly, intergovernmentalism is underpinned by rationalist assumptions and is organised around the principle of rational actors seeking to maximise their utility (Pollack, 2012). In ignoring the power of rules and identities, intergovernmentalism does not help in explaining

actors' reluctance to disrupt the overarching political consensus, even when it is operating against their interest.

Thirdly, intergovernmentalists make assumptions that predict the opposite of the situation observed with the losers of Bologna. For instance, referring to the *bargaining concept*, Moravcsik & Vachudova (2003) argue that those who benefit more from the collaboration are more likely to make larger concessions. But, as I discuss in the empirical chapters, it is actually the losers that make larger concessions, by undergoing costly reforms to increase student mobility, while, at best not being able to benefit from it and at worst being harmed. Moreover, the *bargaining concept,* advanced by intergovernmentalists, holds that countries less enthusiastic about the cooperation will carry a higher bargaining power (Moravcsik, 1997). Congruent with this line of argument, Gruber (2000) assumes that it is in members' strategic interest to voice discontent with the cooperation (even if the loss is not substantial) just to increase their bargaining power. Consequently, this point of view cannot explain why the losers have indeed refrained from voicing their discontent.

Finally, while arguing that state's preferences are an aggregate of interests of the most powerful domestic groups, Moravcsik (2004) predicts that when such course of action goes against the long-term benefit of larger societal groups, the policy will not be long-lasting. Following this theoretical proposition, we could assume that although the participation of the losers in Bologna might have initially benefited powerful domestic groups, it should also be beneficial to the society at large, given that the cooperation has already lasted for twenty years. However, these propositions do not comply with the empirical reality observed in the losing countries, which indicates the limitations of this theory to offer a thorough understanding of my research puzzle. Moreover, these theoretical limitations make it necessary to pay closer attention to the way in which elites maintain influence through persuading other groups, including publics, that their interests are best served by trusting them.

d. Neo functionalism

Neo Functionalism is another theory developed to explain European Integration, although many of its predictions have been argued to be mistaken when applied in the EU context (Mcgowan, 2007). Developing from a rational choice standpoint, it explains the state's motivation to join international cooperation with reference to the need to tackle increasing cross border transactions (Haas, 1975). Once supranational institutions deliver solutions for "European problems", trans-actors will pool their resources, and upgrade their common interest. Thus, the more supranational authorities will be able to offer solutions; the more actors will seek to influence them (Niemann & Schmitter, 2019; Sandholtz & Sweet, 2013).

From this line of reasoning, we could assume that Bologna started as a process of collectively tackling a common problem, such as low levels of student mobility, and that it continued to develop further due to its success in delivering for its member states. However, this theoretical argument does not explain why countries came together to tackle an issue such as increasing student mobility, given that it did not represent the interests of all members. Indeed, the membership had directly competing interests, as net-importing countries would benefit from higher mobility, while net-exporters would be harmed by it.

Moreover, Neo-Functionalism brings the concept of path dependence into the equation, referring to it as *spillover* effect. Mattli and Burley (1993) argue that the integration process is often accompanied with *functional spillover* (integration of sectors), *political spillover* (integration of the groups of interests) and upgrading of common interest (delegating some power to mediators to ensure the long-term interest). Similarly, Hurrell (1995) distinguishes between *functional* and *political spillover*. He argues that *functional spillover* starts with small steps towards integration in one policy area, which will later lead to more complex problems that require further integration in other sectors.

Employing these theoretical constructs, one can interpret the losers' engagement with Bologna's agenda as part of a *spillover* effect, in domestic political, economic and social terms. These propositions gain explanatory value, in the light of the growing influence of the

European Commission over the Bologna policies (see Papatsiba, 2006). However, some caveats noted here may be taken into consideration. Firstly, institutional efficiency is central in the *spillover* effect (Niemann & Schmitter, 2019), and therefore it should be expected only when supranational institutions become better at solving common problems, not when their agenda makes countries worse off. Secondly, the *spillover* effect is often interpreted in the framework of powerful international institutions that become independent of nation-states (Mcgowan, 2007). As Hurrell (1995, p.61) puts it: "Neofunctionalism views institutions as fundamental and is thus difficult to relate to the relatively low levels of institutionalisation found in many regionalist schemes". Bologna, it may be suggested, is a case in point: it has low levels of institutionalisation, weak coordination and governing structures and the process relies on voluntary cooperation (Vögtle, 2019).

Finally, neo-functionalism is actor-centred, and it proposes a helpful construct of the categories of actors involved in policymaking. Proponents of this theory (Sandholtz & Sweet, 2013) suggest that actors involved in shaping countries' preferences operate on three levels: above the nation-state (supranational), below it (in national groups of interests) and in the national governments. They argue that the latter act as gatekeepers for the interests and agendas of the two other layers of actors. Moreover, neo-functionalism puts an emphasis on the integration of elites, which, as I show in the empirical chapters 5 and 7, is a useful theoretical proposition for this study.

However, neo-functionalism takes actors' preferences as materially given and independent of the way that they are socially constructed (Pierson, 2004). In other words, it sees European integration in terms of something that can be observed and quantified, without recognising the need to focus on processes and the interaction of actors within and with institutions. Consequently, it cannot explain the whole picture of my research puzzle, for which reason I turn to other theoretical constructs that employ the logic of appropriateness.

II. The logic of appropriateness

> Humans maintain a repertoire of roles and identities, each providing rules of appropriate behaviour in situations for which they are relevant. Following rules of a role or identity is a relatively complicated cognitive process involving thoughtful, reasoning behaviour; but the processes of reasoning are not primarily connected to the anticipation of future consequences as they are in most contemporary conceptions of rationality. Actors use criteria of similarity and congruence, rather than likelihood and value.
>
> (March & Olsen, 2011, p.480)

As discussed above, proponents of rational choice theory argue that individuals pursue their self-interest and seek to maximise utility, and therefore their actions represent a calculation of anticipated outcomes (Brennan & Buchanan, 2008). From this perspective, rules are either irrelevant, or they represent interests and power (Rowe 1989). However, this logic has been strongly contested by proponents of the logic of appropriateness, who offer an alternative interpretation that explains action as a reflection of an actor's attempt to respond to a given context within a framework of obligations that derive from their identity (Goldmann, 2005).

Two authors who have dedicated most of their academic work to exploring and developing this perspective, March and Olsen, argue that "[p]olitical actors organise themselves and act in accordance with rules and practices" (March & Olsen, 2009, p.4). They explain that the appropriate behaviour is to be understood as a response to certain cognitive and normative rules that are followed because they are seen as natural, legitimate and expected for the particular identity, role, community, institution or situation (March & Olsen, 1994).

Table 2.2 (below) illustrates the type of questions that actors ask to organise interaction between their individual preferences and social justification (March and Olsen, 1989).

Table 2.2 : Methods of reasoning according to March and Olsen

	Rational Choice (Anticipatory action)	The logic of Appropriateness (Obligatory Action)
1	What are my alternatives?	What kind of situation is this?
2	What are my values?	Who am I?
3	What are the consequences of my alternatives for my values?	How appropriate are different actions for me in this situation?
4	Choose the alternative that has the best consequences.	Do what is most appropriate.

Source: March and Olsen, 1989, p.23

These rules are learned through discourse, experience, practices and processes, and occur even unconsciously, in which case actors may rationalise them afterwards (Olsen, 2001; Eder, 1999). They are diffused through social networks, mediated by language, and are maintained by institutions that make them possible through resource allocation, and by defining the "proper" role or identity (March & Olsen, 2009; 2011; MacIntyre, 1988). As Stoelhorst (2008) has put it, institutions create "the rules of the game", by defining the limits within which human interaction can develop and create a complex human environment.

However, critics of this perspective have pointed out that it tends to be deterministic, taking actors as pre-programmed by institutions to act in a certain way (Sending, 2002). Responding to this criticism, March and Olsen (1995; 2009) have emphasised that the logic of appropriateness does not rule out that actors have interests, nor that they engage in calculations and anticipation of outcomes, but argue that these interests are socially constructed, and these calculations are made within their understanding of what is seen as appropriate for their identity in the given context.

As I discuss below, the logic of appropriateness underpins my theoretical approach to the research puzzle. Using it together with other congruent theoretical constructs, I interpret the behaviour of actors at both the national and international level. Paradoxically, moving away from rational choice hypothesis, the losers' *loyalty* seems more rational. Not least, because once they go down a losing path, the costs of *exiting* increase and the scope of available choices narrow down significantly, as I discuss below.

a. Constructivism

> 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons because the British are friends of the United States and the North Koreans are not, and amity and enmity is a function of shared understandings.
>
> (Wendt, 1995, p.73)

Like neorealists, constructivists take states as units of analysis, and they also share a set of assumptions, such as that international politics is anarchic, or that states are rational actors and seek self-preservation (Hurd, 2008a; Wendt, 1995). However, while accepting that states have interests and preferences, constructivists argue that they are not fixed in objective reality

(Schimmelfennig, 2013). Instead, they argue that interests are socially constructed and can be altered by information, by other actors' actions (Oye, 1985) or by ideational factors (Beland & Cox, 2011; Gofas & Hay, 2010). Even the cause-effect relationship is produced by a web of meanings that a social group shares, and by the discourse that they employ (Price, 2008). Hence, while accepting the principle of international anarchy, constructivists believe that it is how states perceive one another, not the anarchy itself, which predicts their behaviour (Wendt, 1992). For instance, Hurd's (2008) suggestion that 'rivalry' is a constructed relationship among states may help shed light on understanding how the losers see their role in Bologna. If they fail to see this cooperation as a zero-sum-game (see chapter 6), they will pay little attention to intra-European competition, and refrain from questioning if it is working to their advantage.

Secondly, while both neorealists and constructivists are structuralists, Wendt (1995) argues that the fundamental structures of international relations are social, and that they do not only influence the behaviours of actors, but also their identities and interests. Constructivists, therefore, extend their focus of attention to the social structures, which are composed of shared knowledge (expectations and understandings), practices and norms (Ostrom, 1998). In other words, constructivists do not deny that objective reality exists, but they argue that how we observe it is mediated by our theoretical understanding, which in itself is influenced by our shared knowledge, ideas and identities (Schimmelfennig, 2013; Hurd, 2008). As Saurugger (2013, p.890) puts it: "…the way we think about the world makes the world as we perceive it".

Thirdly, constructivists stress the importance of ideas and shared understanding, which are demonstrated through practices and processes (Schimmelfennig, 2013; Wendt, 1995). As Simpson (2008, p.257) succinctly puts it: "while actors have ideas, it is true also that ideas have actors". Ideas and understanding shape actors' action, but interaction, on the other hand, shape these ideas and understanding (Wendt, 1987). Following this line of reasoning, history matters, because it shapes ideas, and through them, it shapes the way problems are understood, and solutions are justified (Klein & Marmor, 2011). Consequently, constructivists highlight the importance of cognitive elements in path reproducing mechanisms.

> Social systems can get 'locked in' to certain patterns by the logic of shared knowledge, adding a source of social inertia or glue that would not exist in a system without culture.
>
> (Wendt 1999, p. 188).

b. Path dependence

Another example that does not comply with predictions of rational choice approach is a path-dependent process, which refers to trajectories that are hard to reverse, for one action leads to other actions taken in the same direction (Feeney & Hogan, 2017; Kay, 2005; Hacker, 2002). Path dependence was first identified by David (1985), who observed that the QWERTY keyboard is the most widely used technology, although inefficient and inferior to other alternatives, because it was developed early and has become the industry standard. Arthur (1994) was the first to theorise this phenomenon by focusing on the importance of path-reinforcing mechanisms. Later, this concept was applied economics by North (1990) and to politics by Pierson (2000), Mahoney (2000) and Thelen (1999).

Since this theory is current across disciplines and fields, including in politics, economics and technology, there are various competing definitions of it. However, there is some consensus among scholars in relation to the conditions in which path dependency occurs:

> a) The default choice is inefficient, or inferior to better alternatives, and actors would prefer to have different outcomes
>
> b) History matters, in a sense that past decisions limit the scope of future options, and the present is dependent on past choices
>
> c) Path-reinforcing mechanisms increase the costs of changing path.

Sydow et al. (2009) recommend starting the study of a path-dependent process by demonstrating the existence of a more efficient alternative that is not being chosen. Pierson (2004) points to the importance of factors, context and the sequence of events that influenced such a decision. Similarly, Kay (2005) emphasises the importance of time when events occur, arguing that decisions accumulated over time restrict the scope of choices for future actors. Next, it becomes crucial to identify mechanisms that reproduce a path. Pierson (2004) and North (1990) maintain that the most powerful path reinforcing mechanism is positive feedback. Pierson explains that social action is constantly reproduced, and ideas reinforced because information gets filtered into "mental maps" that confirm existing beliefs about a certain policy. Similarly, North argues that feedback might be positive even for a non-efficient process,

because causal links in politics are rarely easy to construct, which obstructs the understanding on the element that is responsible for the undesired outcomes.

Indeed, Pierson (2004) argues that even when these obstacles are overcome, and mistakes or failures are obvious, institutions do not act swiftly to address them, because they are biased towards the *status quo*. He argues that short-sightedness of politicians discourages them from changing a path, which will incur immediate costs, in anticipation of future benefits. To that end, we should assume that if a change of path were to come, it would be from interest groups that are likely to have a longer operational timespan than politicians do. However, for reasons discussed in chapter 6, this has not happened in Lithuania and Albania.

A third path-reinforcing mechanism is the learning effect (Koch et al., 2009; North, 1990). Sydow et al. (2009) argue that accumulated knowledge and skills make a path easier to follow, whereas changing it becomes costly, as it requires learning new skills and acquiring new knowledge. Moreover, the learning curve is related to coordination costs, which have been summarised by David (2000, p.11) in the following passage:

> A coordination equilibrium, thus, provides us with the paradigmatic situation in which individuals are content to remain to do something, even though they would be happier doing something else if everybody would do that other thing too. The reason they don't change what they are doing is, generically, that there are information imperfections that make it unlikely that a decentralised process can get everyone coordinated to move elsewhere, collectively.

Other authors have suggested additional path-reproducing mechanisms such as normative reasons (Giddens, 1984), economic costs (Puffert, 2002), and political consequences of going against a path that enjoys wide-spread legitimacy, or is supported by a powerful elite (Mahoney & Schensul, 2009). A similar point is made by other authors (Sydow et al., 2009), who argue that actors' preferences are often adjusted to the expectations of others. Thus, some actors fear the losing of legitimacy, or membership, and being cast "outsiders", if they do not support a popular choice. In line with this reasoning, we could anticipate that actors might follow a "popular" path, even when it goes against their self-interest.

All these mechanisms increase the cost of changing the path, and “the individual actor becomes entrapped in the system's dynamics” (Sydow et al., 2009, p.691). However, we

cannot talk about "lock-in" in political path-dependent processes, for alternatives are not eliminated, but the scope of choices is narrowed until reinforcing mechanisms are eliminated (Pierson, 2004; Katznelson, 2003; Thelen, 1999; North 1990). Thus, the past does not inevitably define the future.

This theoretical perspective has the potential to shed light on my research puzzle. Indeed, other authors have made this point earlier. Ravinet (2008), while providing a historical account of Bologna, argues that ministers joined it while being ill-informed about its purpose and future outcomes. They were then trapped in its governing mechanisms, finding it difficult to *exit* or defect. Similarly, Feeney & Hogan, (2017) use path dependence theory to explain in broad terms the development of a Qualifications Framework in the EHEA. Nevertheless, it has not been the focus of these studies to explain the losers' motivation towards Bologna, or the national context and path-reinforcing mechanisms that operate at the national level. Therefore, path dependence has been assumed, rather than explained by providing empirical evidence of path reproducing mechanisms that operate at the national context. Moreover, as I show in chapter 6, even if some ministers could have not been fully informed about Bologna, they have been aware of the overarching goal of this process to increase outward mobility rates. Moreover, they have been aware of potential ramifications of such course of action.

On the other hand, although path dependence has some purchase on my questions, I feel there are some caveats to be taken into consideration here. Firstly, we need to investigate what persuaded the losers that Bologna was the most viable alternative for their interests. This becomes especially puzzling if we consider that most of the losers lacked the means to compete internationally. Secondly, while path dependence may have increased the exiting costs, it should also have increased countries' incentives to *voice* their discontent (Hirschman, 1978), or defect from the implementation of joint commitments, given the voluntary nature of this cooperation. But empirical evidence presented in the empirical chapters 6 and 7 does not support such a reading of events.

2.3. My theoretical approach to the research puzzle

In table nr.2.1 (above) I have summarised theoretical predictions made by rational choice theories, highlighting their failure to provide convincing answers to my research puzzle. Firstly, neorealist propositions that countries will pursue material interests (power and security), or would be coerced into international cooperation, cannot explain the behaviour of the losers whose participation is voluntary, although not beneficial to their interests. Secondly, neoliberal institutionalism and theories developed to explain European integration, such as intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism, cannot explain this puzzle either, because they rest on assumptions that international cooperation is welfare-promoting, which cannot explain the emergence of losers. Moreover, rational choice theories take preferences as stable, paying little attention to the context, ideas and processes through which these interests are formed and changed (Carter et al., 2015). Hence, they take the state's interests to be pre-political, ignoring social interactions that shape such interests (Simpson, 2008). To that end, I employ the logic of appropriateness, as a better theoretical construct to explain my research puzzle. I approach the latter from a constructivist approach, focusing on the way in which ideas are used to motivate action and justify decisions. However, I also borrow some concepts from intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism, to explain the role of domestic actors in influencing states' preferences in the international arena, and identifying them into three levels of governance, including beyond and below the nation-state.

a. Conceptualising politics and power

> Political science is to a large extent based upon the study of the sovereign, territorial state, and the Westphalian state system. Yet the hierarchical role of the political centre within each state and the "anarchic" relations between states are undergoing major transformations, for example in the European Union. An implication is that there is a need for new ways of describing how authority, rights, obligations, interaction, attention, experience, memory, and resources are organised, beyond hierarchies and markets.
>
> (March & Olsen, 2009, p.13)

After discussing in the above sections the different theories that seek to answer my research questions, I will now unpack the conceptual framework that I apply in this study, explaining how I understand and discuss concepts like policy and governance, and how much importance

I give to social structures, institutions, actors and context. Before that, the three following points need to be clarified:

Firstly, this study is process-oriented, and I approach it from a constructivist perspective, assuming a reality underpinned by a web of meaning that is socially produced in the interaction between actors and institutions. Moreover, I use the concept of path dependence, to explain how actors get "locked-in" to processes that they may not support, and I adopt this approach, because I believe that history matters. But it does not always matter in the same way. It is the way in which actors interpret the history that makes it important, and these interpretations are influenced by ideas, which are often shaped through political discourse.

Secondly, I believe rational choice theories deny something of the complexity of human nature, which is better captured by the logic of appropriateness. I do not assume actors to be irrational, or as not acting purposefully or lacking interests. Rather I conceptualise these interests as political; by which I mean that their meaning is socially constructed (Kauppi, 2010). Ideas matter and they create an understanding that motivates action or inaction.

Thirdly, in this study institutions are understood as composed of ideas, rules and values, that define the scope of action, by allowing or prohibiting certain behaviours (March & Olsen, 2009; North, 2005; Koremenos et al., 2003; Wendt, 1987). Hence, institutions have a central role in understanding human behaviour. I also recognise the agency of actors and their capacity to make meaning in new contexts. Thus, I focus on the interaction as well as on the discourse employed to justify choices made by actors.

Subsequently, it becomes crucial to recognise the fluid nature of the world in which actors are seeking to make sense and to act, as well as the different capacities and resources they may have to work with across institutions, states and the education policy space. To that end, we need to "bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences" (Ozga, 1990, p.359).

b. Policy and policy response

The term policy often goes undefined, and its meaning is taken for granted. In contrast it is defined simply as the outcome of a policy process (Heywood, 2013). However, in this study, I move away from the understanding of policy as an objective 'thing' that reflects the decisions of rational authority and that then has effects in terms of action to solve problems and produce agreed solutions. Rather, I see policy analysis as productively engaged in understanding the interaction between actors which cannot be reduced to their rational calculations, but which is embedded in the social norms and cultural values, and the context where actors operate (Saurugger, 2013). Of course, policies are interventions to solve practical problems, but they are also instruments designed to influence actors' preferences and actions (Ward et al., 2016; Ball, 1993). Therefore, in this study, a policy is understood and discussed as a process that is negotiated, promoted and contested in multiple sites (Yeatman, 1998). Ball (1993) argues that policies restructure, redistribute and disrupt power relations by creating circumstances that narrow or change the range of available options. However, he emphasises that policies "enter, rather than simply change power relations" (Ball, 1993, p.13). Consequently, education policy is understood here as a site where there is a power-play between actors to decide the purpose of education, how it should be organised and delivered, as well as what takes priority and what is to be neglected (Ward et al., 2016).

As discussed in the previous chapter, for a long-time education has been considered as an exclusive domain of national sovereignty, but in the recent decades there has been an increased interference from international organisations. They have established a common frame of reference, for a policy discourse that is often called "global policy speak" (Novoa, 2002). Consequently, a common understanding of education policy is promoted globally and then translated into the local spaces, where global agendas take priority over existing national priorities (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). Congruently, the policy discourse that legitimises the Bologna reforms, because of its decontextualized character, has travelled globally, and is presented as a universal truth, universally applicable (Börzel & Risse 2012; See also Bourdieu, 2003). As Lingard and Ozga, (2007, p.71) succinctly put it:

> This policy discourse promotes a wide range of activity and justifies major shifts in national, institutional and individual practices and processes, yet remains, for the most part, decontextualised, unexamined and unspecific.

However, actors are not passive recipients of ideas or policies, and therefore they are capable of policy resistance (Ward et al., 2016; Honig, 2006). Some authors argue (Mundy et al., 2016), that education policies are an outcome of the local contest, whereas Harvey (2005) argues that subjects accept a policy only if it responds to their values and desires. To that end, it becomes crucial to identify the values that take precedence over the material interests of the losing countries, discouraging them from resisting this policy, even when it does not respond to their national interest. To that end, I pay attention to the distribution of power, social structures, relationships and discourses around education in both local and global contexts.

c. From government to governance

As discussed above, globalisation developments are changing the way in which policies are shaped, and subjects are governed. New actors have entered the governing space, and new governing tools are employed, marking a shift from government to governance (Bevir, 2012). Consequently, I move away from traditional views on power and government that are discussed below, for they are unable to provide satisfactory answers to the questions on who is governing and how is power exercised?

The faces of power

In 1957 Robert Dahl asked the question “What is power?”, to which the answer was to get B to do something for A that they would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957; 1961). This definitions is congruent with the realist theory, which focuses on the conflict between competing interests of rational actors (Smeed et al., 2009).

Bachrach and Baratz, in their article “The two faces of power” (1962), have advanced this theoretical framework arguing that powerful actors could prevent others from acting against their interests, and therefore power can also be observed both in failure to act. This definition is underpinned by the assumption that actors’ preferences are in line with their interests, and therefore when actors fail to defend their interests, this is not because their preferences have changed, but because they have been prevented from acting (Barach & Baratz, 1970).

> Of course, power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. Power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences.
>
> (Barach & Baratz, 1970, p.7)

However, this view neglects the cases when B's preferences are manipulated to be in line with A's best interests. This point is taken by Lukes (2004), who brings the concept of "three-dimensionality" of power, to argue that the highest exercise of power is not to prevent conflict, but to eliminate it, by altering B's preferences and understandings. Or as he puts it:

> Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?
>
> (Lukes, 2005, p.20)

This theoretical construct helps understanding why the losers refrain from voicing their discontent at the international arena, such as the Paris conference discussed in chapter 7.

Similarly, to Lukes' view, Joseph Nye coined the term "soft power" in a highly influential paper published in 1990, and later in his book with the same title (Nye, 1990; 2004). Soft power refers to the power of attraction towards a certain cultural model, ideas or ideology (Nye, 1990). This concept, which was developed in the early 1990s to explain the attraction of many former "post-communist" countries towards the Western way of life, has been widely used over the past two decades to explain how persuasion and manipulation are being used by governments and international organisations to co-opt actors' preferences and shape their understanding of what is normal and appropriate (Manners, 2006; Nye, 2004).

The *soft power* perspective also marks a departure from the traditional view on how power is exercised, in that it is no longer resorting to coercion (two faces of power), but through *soft* tools that seek to alter actors' preferences and understanding. There is a wide variety of soft governing tools, from agenda-setting and issue framing, through means of controlling

information and learning, to mechanisms of encouraging imitation and socialisation, to name but a few (Ozga, 2018; Carney et al., 2012; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Lukes, 2004).

Some authors have studied these governing tools in the policy field of education, and argue that they are compelling and effective in achieving what is often considered as “governance without government” (Ozga, 2016; Ozga *et al.,*2013; Mundy, 2010; Lawn, 2006). Accordingly, I use this conceptual framework to investigate the soft power tools that may have made Bologna’s agenda “attractive” to the Losers, even when it is not in line with their interests.

Indeed, although not arguing from the perspective of the losers, many authors have suggested that Bologna is promoted through soft governing tools (Moscovitz & Zahavi, 2019; Harmsen, 2013; Corbett, 2011; Fejes, 2008). In the same vein, several observations have concluded that Bologna’s agenda is promoted through the “Open Method of Coordination” (OMC), which includes policy coordination and evaluation by comparison (Veiga & Amaral, 2012; Dunn, 2005; Balzer & Martens, 2004). Others have investigated the use of social learning and financial incentives to promote this agenda in European higher education (Sedelmeier, 2011; Graziano & Vink, 2007; Borzel & Risse 2003).

Moreover, as discussed below, another soft governing tool has been opinion formation through public discourse and interpretation (Fejes, 2008). As Oye (1985) argues, information control has the power to shape the collective understanding of a policy domain, and therefore alter states’ preferences. Similarly, data interpretation has become key in the governing process especially if we consider that production of the vast amount of data is a distinctive character of new forms of governance (Grek, 2009; Fejes et al., 2009). As Ozga (2018, p.742) succinctly puts it "data do not speak for themselves". Hence, the ability to interpret data gives new actors a key role in identifying political problems and solutions and shaping the common understanding over specific issues (Ozga, 2012, 2013).

As I discuss in the empirical chapters, I work with these ideas to investigate the power of soft governing tools such as the Bologna implementation scorecards, or colour-coded maps, to alter preferences of losers towards this policy agenda, and steer their actions towards a path that may not necessarily represent their national interest, or even go against it.

> Political settings where one set of actors must initially impose their preferences on another set through open conflict ("the first face of power") may change over time into settings where power relations are so uneven that anticipated reactions and agenda control ("the second face of power") and ideological manipulation ("the third face") make open political conflict unnecessary.
>
> (Pierson, 2004, p.37)

Finally, as discussed above, *governance* has shifted from defined formal hierarchies towards more flexible coordination of markets and networks (Ball & Junemann, 2012). Government processes cease to be bound to legally recognised functions, and therefore governing is no longer an exclusive right of governments (Miller and Rose 2008). As a corollary of these changes in the modes of governance, and the introduction of new governing practices, new policy actors have entered the policy space, making the government one among many actors involved in the governing process (Ozga, 2018; Lingard & Ozga, 2007). As these new actors use new policy instruments and operate outside of conventional hierarchies, they create and recreate new governing practices in the interaction (Ozga, 2019; Bevir, 2012; Rhodes, 1996). Thus, it becomes crucial to cast light on the mechanisms at play and understand their impact in altering actors' views and preferences and interests. It also important to identify actors involved in the soft governing process, and gauge their power to prevent the losers from voicing their complaints and to implement Bologna policies uncritically, or even in manipulating them so that they do not identify conflict in the first place. To that end, I move away from the pluralist view on how the power is distributed in society, as I discuss in the following section.

Network governance

In his book "Who governs?", Dahl (1961) argues that in liberal societies, power is equally distributed among social groups and decision-making results from the conflict of interests. Neo-pluralists contest the idea that power is equally distributed among social groups, but they maintain that in liberal societies the government is not the only actor in policymaking (Mundy et al., 2016; McFarland, 2010), and suggests there are policy elites operating within most policy domains (Walker, 1991). This concept has been theorised as "networked governance" by Heclo (1978), Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1993) and (Bevir,2012). Consequently,

governance has become less a matter of formal hierarchies, and more a matter of networked governing processes that have taken a central role in governance (Goodin, 2011).

These developments are observed in the policy domain of education, where the field of policymaking is being populated by new actors (Ozga, 2019; Avant et al., 2010). Through a process of policy diffusion, policy ideas travel from core countries to the national context in the periphery, through networks of politicians, policymakers and action elites (Dobbin, Simmons, & Garrett 2007; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Drori et al. 2003; Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb 2002). Therefore, national policymakers are often faced with a limited repertoire of policy ideas to choose from, which are offered (and sometimes even required) by international actors or through institutional settings that make them available (Cloutier and Langley, 2013). Furthermore, the governing process has become more complex, and new networks of experts and analysts have emerged in order to coordinate and manage the activity (Shiroma, 2014). These actors have knowledge that governments need and are given responsibilities that weaken the autonomy of governments (Ozga, 2019).

However, it is essential to distinguish between interest groups and elites, who often pursue personal agendas, while claiming to represent certain interest groups or the state as a whole. These elites are political, gaining political legitimacy back home when recognised by international organisations (see, for example, Pevehouse, 2002). But they are also professional, gaining power by acting as a liaison between national and international agencies, and by being able to translate policies into the local context (Ozga, 2018). The latter, which are often referred as “action elites”, maintain a political power that is not defined by their position in the formal hierarchy, but by their actions and their crucial role in the governing process (Carter & Lawn, 2015; Reed, 2012; Bonds, 2010; Lendvai & Stubbs, 2009).

Nevertheless, I do not underplay the role of the government, because, as neo-pluralists argue (McFarland, 2010), governments are not limited to being merely a referee among interest groups competing for power, but acts as an essential actor by undertaking policy initiatives. Their role is even greater in post-communist countries (e.g. Albania and Lithuania), where

interest groups have limited mechanisms to influence decisionmaking (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2017; Silova, 2009). Hence, scoring low in the corporatism Index (Jahn, 2016), as well as on government accountability (see the World Bank index produced by Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2011), creates a political environment where decisionmaking is often restricted to a small group of unaccountable political actors (see chapter 6 and 7).

d. context and political culture

Both materialist and rationalist approaches often offer a limited perspective on politics by focusing on states as units of analysis and neglecting domestic politics and the context in which the state's preferences are shaped. In this study, I pay attention to governing practices and interpret them as embedded in the context in which they occur, because I believe that the properties of agents are created and mobilised within a social structure, and material resources can explain actors' preferences through the lens of shared knowledge, ideas and ideology. Context becomes important when policy trends and directions associated with globalisation and pressure for convergence are translated in local settings, and modified by local narratives by giving "local meanings to global ideas" (Ozga, 2011; Lingard & Ozga, 2007).

Political Culture

Political Culture theory is often contrasted with rational choice explanations, as it seeks to explain political behaviour through the lens of culture (Voinea & Neumann, 2019). It maintains that history matters, because it shapes social norms that define appropriate behaviour, whereas value stability influences the way in which institutions operate (Voinea & Neumann, 2019; Whitefield, 2005; Almond, 2000). To illustrate, research by Chaisty & Whitefield (2015) has shown that the political legacy of "post-communist" countries has shaped the way in which certain political issues are seen, perceived and discussed in the political sphere. Moreover, Chaisty and Whitefield (2017) have shown that in times of political uncertainty, rational choice theories, which predict that actors calculate payoffs from every available alternative, cannot adequately explain institutional choices. Thus, identity-based theories provide a better

understanding of the institutional preferences of citizens, especially in the context of the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe (MacFarlane, 2015).

To that end, in seeking to explain the behaviour of the losers of Bologna, I pay attention to the political culture, for I posit that social factors, such as norms and culture, influene actors' identities, and preferences (Jupille et al. 2003; Almond, 2000; Almond & Verba, 1963). I employ this theory to explain actors' cognitive understanding of the social structures in which they operate, as well as social practices and processes that make political choices possible or even preferable (see Whitefield, 2005). However, I am aware of its limitations in explaining beliefs and political action, even in post-communist context (see Whitefield & Evans, 1999).

The 'cognitive consensus.'

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bologna is underpinned by an ideology that has encouraged thinking about education in economic terms (Berman, 2014). It has been facilitated by a dominant discourse that has legitimised higher education reform, helping it go unchallenged and unexplored (Fejes, 2008; Harvey, 2005).

> Perhaps the most critical achievement of Bologna has been the creation of a 'common language'–a shared, pan-European framework for the understanding of higher education that has both facilitated discussion and provided templates for reform. (Harmsen, 2013, p.27)

This discourse has provided new ways of thinking about actors' roles and identities (Ball, 2008), and therefore has contributed to the emergence of a cognitive consensus around education policies, shaping the preferences and understanding of key actors (Borrás & Radaelli, 2011; Johansson, 2008; Liesner, 2006). This ruling consensus that has emerged is very difficult to challenge or dispute (Ball, 2008; Foucault, 2000; Sander, 1998), persuading the policy elite that There Is No Alternative to it (TINA).

This mindset of TINA, presented by Thatcher in the 1980s (Berlinski, 2008), seems to be a clear example of the *"senso commune"* used by Antonio Gramsci (1971), who used the term to explain the popular beliefs that emerge through historical processes and become established as the only reality. Coining the term "Cultural Hegemony" Gramsci argues that hierarchies and subordination are seen as forces of nature, as "the way things are", and

therefore are inevitable, inescapable and not open to question. That does not mean that actors prefer the situation in which they are in, or that they do not mind subordination, but they cannot see how things can be different (Crehan, 2011; Gramsci, 1971).

David Harvey develops this concept further in his book “A brief history of Neoliberalism”, which starts with the following paragraph:

> For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question.
>
> (Harvey, 2005, p.5)

Similarly, Grundmann and Stehr (2012) talk about the attempts of policy actors to establish a “cognitive consensus” in de-politicising political issues, by assuming that we can use science to give definite answers to political questions. Ozga (2018, p.746) takes up the term ‘cognitive consensus”, defined as “the product of cultural consensus around models of best practice” to explain the mechanism through which a neo-liberal hegemony is being legitimised and enabled to dominate education reforms, including Bologna.

By employing these theoretical constructs, and propositions put forward by other researchers, I strive to analyse the 'cognitive consensus' around Bologna, by focusing on the shared understanding among the policy elites in the losing countries. In so doing, I seek to understand the losers' preferences, even when, from a rationalist point of view, they seem unreasonable.

The Europeanisation process

From a constructivist point of view, states are not taken as given entities, but as identities constructed through historical processes (Hurd, 2008). Similarly, Europe is not seen as an objective reality constrained by institutions and geographic borders, but as a discourse and as space of action (see Carter, Freeman & Lawn, 2015; Ozga & Dubois-Shaik, 2015).

Therefore, constructivism provides a useful lens to understand policy formation in Europe, by unpacking the shared understanding that informs social practices and political choices (Matonytė & Morkevičius, 2009). To that end, a helpful theoretical construct is Europeanisation, which is understood to describe the influence of the European model

(cultural, political and organisational) within and beyond Europe (Flockhart, 2006). A definition of this concept is offered by Radaelli (2000, p. 4):

> Europeanization refers to processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Bologna is an intergovernmental process developed outside of the EU framework, and therefore, Radaelli's definition cannot apply to it. Yet several authors consider Bologna part of the Europeanisation process, (see Vukasovic, 2013; Neave & Veiga, 2012; Reinalda, 2008).

Other authors argue that Europeanisation should not be restricted merely to EU policies and to domains controlled by the Commission (Palier et al., 2006). But Musselin (2009), raises the concern that such a broad definition risks weakening the concept. Hence, she suggests a modified definition that can be applied to Bologna as part of the Europeanisation process:

> 'process of (a) construction; (b) diffusion; and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms' first defined and consolidated in the making of intergovernmental public policy and politics 'and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourses, identities, political structures and public policies' of EU countries and other European countries.
>
> (Musselin, 2009, p.183, emphasis added)

Finally, quite often, the focus of inquiry has been quite EU-centrist, focusing on the EU role in influencing Bologna policies (Kehm & Teichler, 2012; Balzer & Martens, 2004) or the impact of these policies in core EU countries. However, as Borzel & Risse (2007) argue, Europeanisation is not a process that occurs only in Brussels. Thus, this 'top-down' institutionalist perspective may not be able to explain cross-cultural differences, because it misses local perspectives that generate different norms and practices. To that end, I am interested in 'bottom-up' versions of Europeanisation, especially from the perspective of the "periphery" of Europe, where many post-communist countries have emerged as losers (see Carney et al., 2012, and Silova, 2009).

2.4 Summary

In table nr.2.3 (below) I have summarised my theoretical approach to the research puzzle, by structuring it around three questions: (i) who governs?; (ii) how is the education policy domain governed?; and (iii) what motivates or limits action?

Table Nr. 2.3 My theoretical framework

Who governs?	Three layers of actors: 1. Supranational actors (IGOs) 2. National governments 3. Subnational interest groups, policy elites and action elites
How is education governed?	A- Two faces of power – powerful actors prevent critics from challenging the ruling consensus • This is done by limiting the space of debate and the available language to discuss these issues B- Soft power (three dimensionality of power) • altering actors' preferences through manipulation • limiting the repertoire of available policies • discourse shapes actors' understanding, and sets the boundaries of what is appropriate for a certain role and identity Soft governing tools: • Soft governing – integration of elites (socialization) • Encouraging imitation and social learning • Comparing and incentivizing competition • Information control and data interpretation • Agenda setting and issue framing • Opinion formation through public discourse • Establishing a common frame of reference ("global policy speak") Path dependence • Actors get locked-in a non-efficient path which they do not prefer, but the costs of switching path is very high • Path reproducing mechanisms increase the costs of exiting • politician's short-sightedness • positive feedback – due to mental maps • learning and coordination costs
What motivates action?	• Actors have interests and preferences, but they are socially constructed, based on what they deem as appropriate for their role and identity • Social norms and institutional rules define appropriate behaviour. • Social interactions are influenced by the political culture and a shared understanding around a policy issue • Actors respond to their common sense about the nature of the things, and the ruling cognitive consensus around a policy domain

I start by arguing that actors involved in policymaking operate in three layers of governance, albeit there is no clear-cut distinction between these layers. I focus on the concept of network governance, to explain the increasing role that is being played by the action elite, who are given responsibilities that diminish the role of the government.

I argue that power is often exercised in preventing critical actors from challenging the ruling consensus on a policy domain. But I also discuss how conflict is eliminated by altering actors' preferences and limiting their choices to a repertoire of policy ideas available to the government. To that end, I analyse a series of soft governing tools that are used to promote policy compliance. Moreover, I discuss how actors' agency is limited by path reproducing mechanisms, which increase the costs of exiting the cooperation.

Bologna is analysed and understood as part of the Europeanisation process. Thus, preferences of the losers are analysed in the context of a drive to embrace the European identity. Thus, a closer attention is paid to the political culture and the social norms that shape a shared understanding of the policy elite, and the institutional rules that guide their actions. Here, preferences are understood to be socially constructed, based on what actors deem as appropriate to their role and identity. To that end, I pay attention to the discourse that is used to legitimise these reforms, and to encourage a common way of thinking about policy solutions. Consequently, it contributes to the emergence of a cognitive consensus that is difficult to challenge, and which persuades the policy actors that this is the way things are, and there is little one can do to change the course of events.

Chapter 3. The research design

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> Let me put it more crudely: insider meanings and complex contextuality cannot be plugged into a regression equation, so one must either marginalise them (the current disciplinary solution) or create a space for research that attends to them…
> (Schatz, 2009, p.315)

3.1 Introduction

In the first two chapters, I explained my research puzzle and the theoretical framework that I use to understand it. Here, I discuss my methodological approach and the choices I have made to collect evidence and answer my research questions (see chart 3.1, below).

In making these choices, I have searched for an approach to the research that would enable me to draw on the key theoretical ideas discussed in chapter 2 in an open and flexible way. I have not assumed a direct link between institutions (including states) or roles and behaviour, but looked for a methodology that might uncover more fluid, shifting, negotiated, and flexible relations playing out among actors. In this study, I take a constructivist approach in understanding reality as mediated through a web of meaning. Actors are not seen as necessarily irrational, or without material interests, but those interests are only important in so far as people attach meaning to them.

Thus, I approach my research puzzle through political ethnography, which offers privileged access into the constructed reality of my 'subjects', seeing issues as they see them, which is often referred to as an "insiders' perspective". Consequently, this methodological approach helps me unpack how actors understand their role in this cooperation, and make sense of their actions, including to pursue a policy agenda that does not represent their interests.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I explain the data collection process and the procedures followed to analyse data and draw conclusions. I explain how I select two representative case studies and what sources I use to collect reliable evidence that allows me to draw conclusions that go beyond my cases. To that end, I describe the measures taken to increase the validity and reliability of my research findings, including reflexivity about the role and impact of the researcher in the research process. I conclude this chapter with some ethical deliberations, explaining the measures taken to protect the research participants.

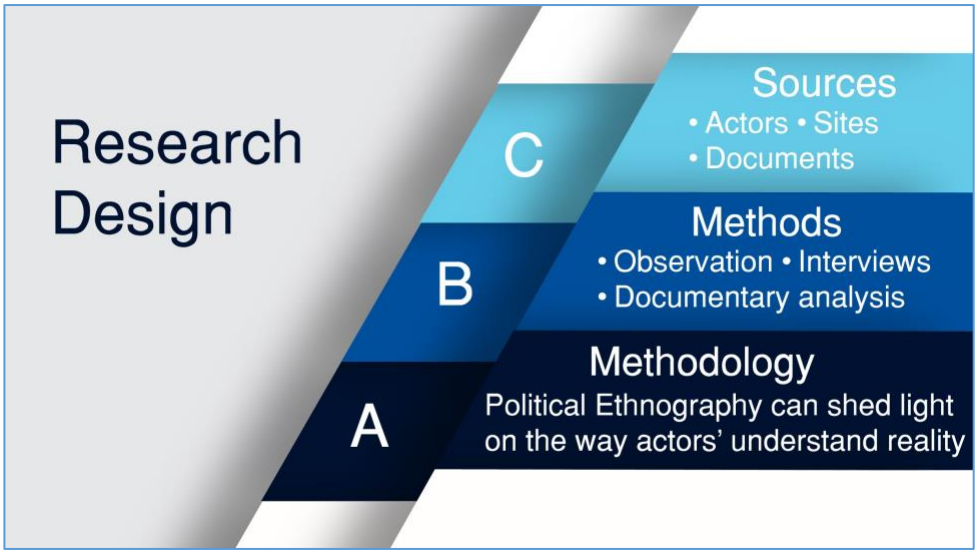


Chart 3.1 The three steps of my research design

3.2 My methodological approach

As discussed in chapter 1, this study aims to explain why actors appear to act against their material interests. To that end, my focus of the inquiry is on exploring the ways in which social relations and interaction among policy actors could reflect both their institutional positioning and their interpretation of meaning. As such, my research design needed to reflect the work of the policy actors at different levels negotiating complex positioning and arriving at policy outcomes. Similarly, it needed to reflect the conceptualisation of European education policy-making as complex and layered, and the impact of Bologna as complex and multi-faceted. This has led me to take an interpretivist and constructivist positioning, and a focus on the relevant 'meanings, beliefs and preferences of the people that shape actions, practices and institutions, as well as the ways in which they do so' (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003, p17).

This study is process-oriented, and therefore its focus is on governance and the tools through which it is able to manufacture consent and promote policy compliance. It also pays attention to path dependence processes, which are underpinned by mechanisms that persuade actors to pursue a certain path. To that end, I approach my research puzzle from an ethnographic approach, for it captures the way in which political actors make sense of their positioning, pays attention to their processes and acknowledges the complex and dynamic quality of the context within which they are operating (Schatz, 2009; Biannci & Connor, 2008; Joseph *et al*., 2007). Political Ethnography permits and even encourages looking at the problem as the participants

understand it, and requires us to enter the social world of the actors, to see it as they see it, and interpret how they understand their social and political reality (Tilly, 2006; Shaw, 1999; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Such a perspective requires what Schatz (2009, p.6) calls 'ethnographic sensibility', that is engagement beyond face-to-face contact, immersion into the research context, so that detailed and rich descriptions of events are generated, which reflect events as they were understood by those involved in them.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in this study politics is not understood as a top-down process to which actors can either resist or comply, but as an interaction of actors with other actors, institutions and sites, through which they construct and reconstruct their role through a web of meanings (Schatz, 2009). To that end, an ethnographic approach allows me to understand how actors are persuaded to go against their interests and to make analytical links to the political culture and social norms (Biannci & Connor 2008). Furthermore, since Bologna is understood and analysed as part of the Europeanisation process, this approach allows me to study how global processes are played out on a local stage (see Burawoy, 2000).

3.3 Data sources

In this study, I use a triangulation of sources (see section 5), which include key moments that act as critical junctures in the Bologna's path; research sites where local actors interact with global agendas; documentary sources, including statistics and newspapers; and actors who play a key role as promoters or recipients of these processes (see Chart 3.2, below).

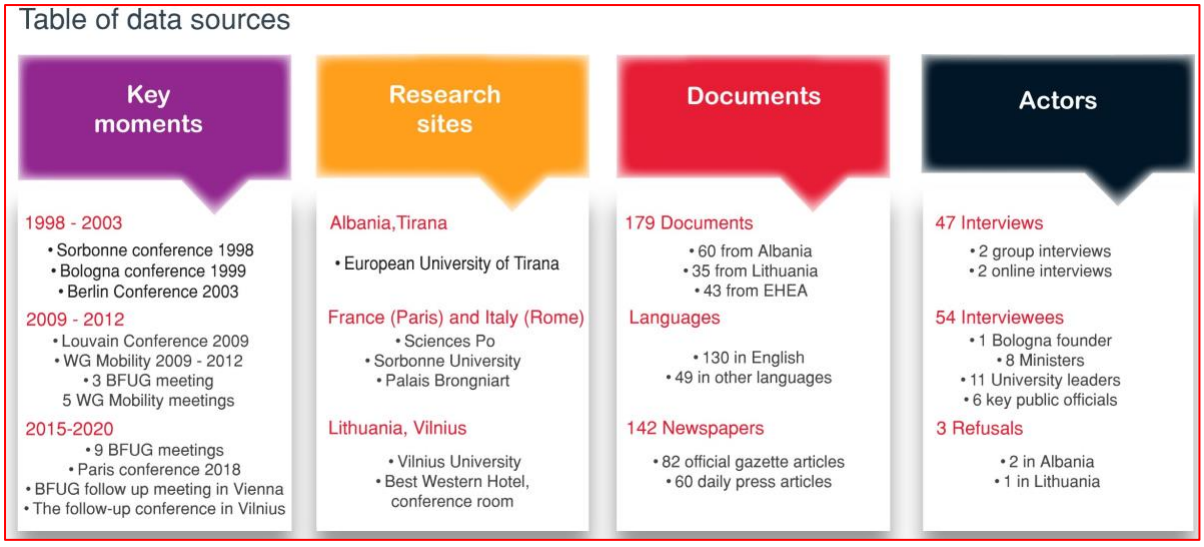


Chart 3.2 the Sources of data for my research

a. Case selection

As discussed in chapter 1, there are winners and losers of Bologna, and I have conducted a large-scale statistical analysis to identify which countries fall into each category (Lieberman, 2005). Here, I conduct a factor analysis as a way to reduce dimensionality of data and identify correlation between being in the losing end of this cooperation and a set political, economic and social factors (Kline, 1994). That allows me to understand better the losers' group, select the most typical cases among them, and draw inferences for the entire group (Gerring, 2008). However, I want to remind the reader that it is not the aim of this study to explain which behaviour or feature contributes to winning or losing, but to understand what motivates the losers to pursue a policy agenda that does not represent their interests.

I have identified a list of winners and losers of Bologna, based on the net balance trends over the past two decades, which are displayed chart 3.3 (below) illustrates a map of winners and losers within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with the latter located in the periphery of Europe, which used to be the Eastern bloc. Indeed, there is a significant correlation (i.e. Pearson r=0.84) between having a legacy of Soviet education model and emerging as a loser in this cooperation.

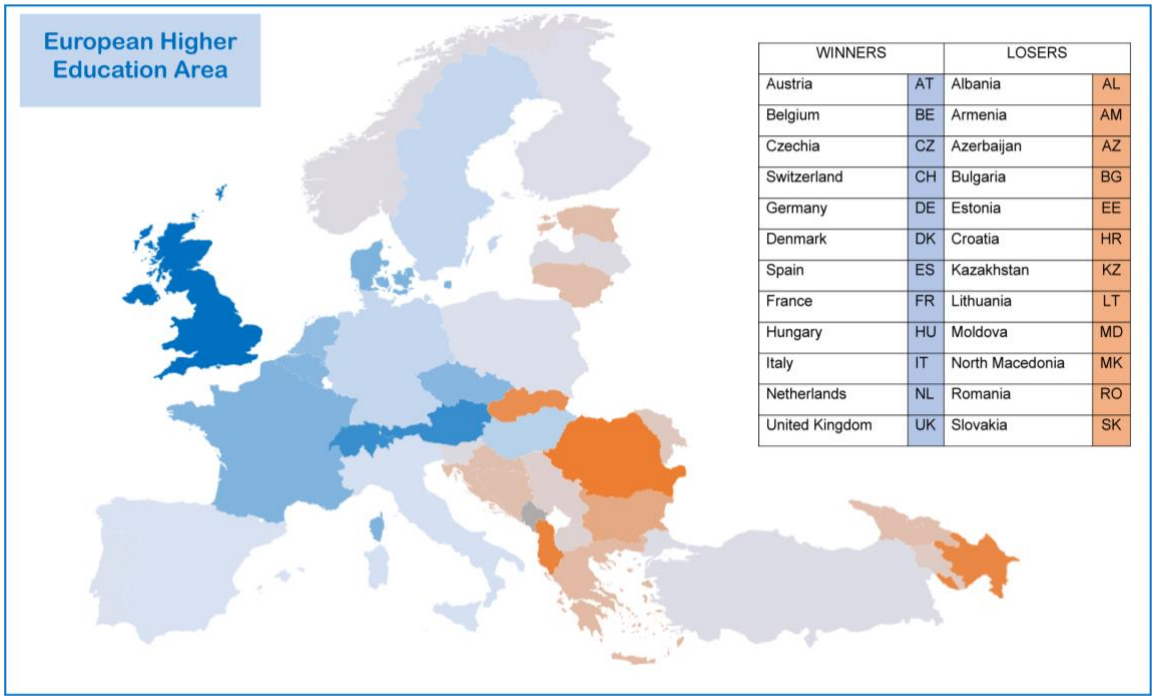


Chart: Nr. 3.3 Orange is used for negative values of the net balance of student mobility rates (losers), whereas blue is used for positive values (winners). The stronger the colour, the greater the value (positive or negative). **Source**: UIS, 2017 **Note**: Some countries (i.e. Kazakhstan) are left out of view to ease the visibility of data.

Moreover, none of the winners is a developing country, suggesting that while wealthy countries may lose, it is very difficult for developing countries to benefit from this cooperation. Regression analysis (chart 3.4, below) reveals a strong correlation between the wealth of a country (measured by the Gross Domestic Product) and student mobility net balance.

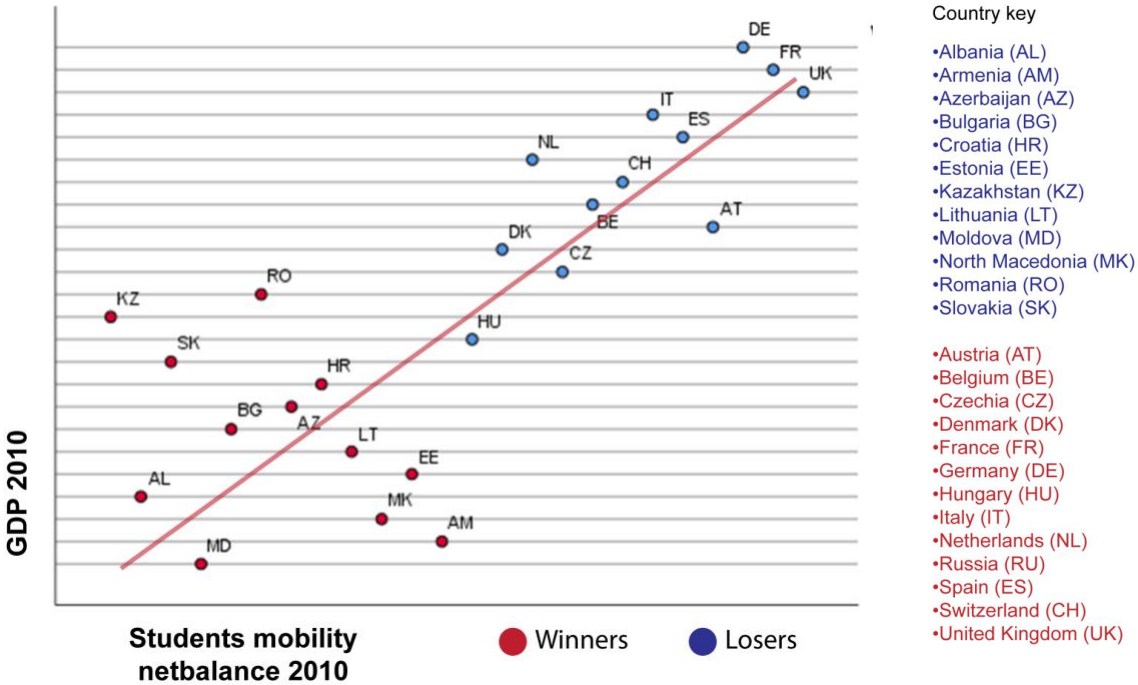


Chart nr. 3.4 – The scatter plot shows the correlation between GDP and the net balance of student mobility numbers in a given year (e.g. 2010) **Sources**: UIS, 2017; World Bank, 2020a

Additionally, as shown in Chart 3.5 (below), there are other common features shared by the losers, such as the population size (Pearson r=0.685) and the EU membership status at the time of becoming a Bologna member (Pearson r=0.775).



Chart Nr. 3.5 Correlation effect between student mobility (winning vs losing) and variables such as GDP, population size, EU membership and political legacy **Source**: UIS, 2017; World Bank, 2020a; EU, 2020

After having a better understanding of the losers' group, I selected the most representative cases of them. I started by excluding six microstates (e.g. San Marino and Vatican City), which do not represent the group. Then, I left out four more countries for which there was not enough data on student mobility (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina). Similarly, three other states were excluded, because of rare political circumstances (e.g. the occurrence of war) that could skew the analysis. Finally, I identified 12 countries with a clear losing trend and high Bologna implementation scores. This decision was based on the aim of this study to explain what motivates the losers to join this cooperation and implement Bologna's commitments.

Table Nr.3.1 Summary of the two cases

	Albania	**Lithuania**
Population	2.9 million	2.9 million
EU membership status	No (just candidate status)	Yes (from 2004)
EHEA membership	From 2003 (third wave)	1999 (founder)
Economic status	Developing country	OECD member (from 2015)
Geographical region	South-Eastern Europe	North-Eastern Europe
Emigration trend	High	High
Remittances	High (21.7% of the GDP)	Low (1.6% of the GDP)

After narrowing the number of available cases, I followed Gerring's (2008) suggestion that “case selection for very small samples must employ purposive (non-random) selection procedures" (p.646). Congruently, I purposefully chose Albania and Lithuania from the pool of cases explained above. Both cases are excellent representatives of the losers, sharing the common features of the group (see table Nr.3.1, above). For instance, they both share a common political past, as part of the Eastern bloc, and being influenced by the Soviet model in higher education. Therefore, these two countries allow me to explore repetitive patterns of policy elites to separate themselves from their political past and embrace a European identity. Furthermore, it allows me to investigate the influence of the political culture in the ways actors interact with institutions, as well as how they understand their role in these processes, which often feeds a powerful *common sense* that discourages actors from resisting.

However, while being similar to the rest of the group, there is a dissimilarity between these two cases, which, according to Gerring (2007) is an advantage. Thus, they have different levels of losses, to begin with. In the first decade of Bologna, Lithuania was considered a ‘closed system’ (see chapter 1), which means that while it had a negative net balance, it had a low percentage of students going in and out of the country (Reis, 2011). Albania, on the other hand, has constantly had the highest negative net balance among the EHEA members (see Appendix 3.16). This difference helps me avoid the trap of drawing conclusions for the entire group while focusing on outliers. Moreover, while Lithuania joined Bologna right from the start, Albania had four more years to ponder this decision, and gauge potential costs of participation. This difference allows me to test the hypothesis of ill-informed losers who had wrong expectations from Bologna membership (see ‘bounded rationality’, Chapter 2).

Additionally, although both countries started from similar economic grounds two decades ago, Lithuania has made a significant economic leap over the past two decades. Thus, although still lagging other advanced EU countries (OECD, 2020b), it is today more developed than Albania, which is still categorised as a developing country (WB, 2020). Similarly, Lithuania has

improved its international status by participating in the EU and the OECD, whereas Albania is still lagging in the EU integration process.

This contrast helps me shed light on the role and interests of national policy elites. As discussed in chapter 4, EU membership gives national elites leverage to operate at the transnational level. On the other hand, being outside of the EU makes Bologna an important international forum for the national policy elite. Thus, by looking at these somewhat dissimilar cases, I can see what remains constant regarding the motives of the losers to participate in this process, as well as their behaviour once they jump on the bandwagon.

b. Key moments and research sites

As discussed in chapter 1, Bologna is a pan-European process that for more than twenty years has occurred simultaneously in multiple sites across the continent. However, I have limited my observation to a few sites and key moments.

Thus, I have chosen to focus on (i) *the international stage*: the ministerial conference of Paris and (ii) *the national stage*: in Albania and Lithuania, where I have spent time working at university, talking to people, watching the media, attending national conferences on Bologna and other events where global phenomena get contextualised. As explained in the following section, and in chapter 7, I have worked in two universities in Tirana and Vilnius, which allowed me to observe social interactions that are key in explaining my research puzzle.

As Burawoy (2001, p.149) put it: “what we understand to be ‘global’ is itself constituted within the local”. Congruently, during my fieldwork in Albania and Lithuania, I was able to collect data that shed light on the internal dynamics within the Albanian Ministry of Education between 1998 and 2003, which helped me unpack the way in which at that time Bologna was perceived ‘from the other side’. I was also able to explore how the policy elite and the public were interacting with these ideas, and what motivated Albania’s insistence on becoming a Bologna member (i.e. The ministry submitted several membership applications before 2003).

On the other hand, looking at Bologna from the perspective of the *path dependence* theory (chapter 2), I focus primarily on critical junctures, which are key moments when the process is steered towards a certain path, away from other alternatives (Capoccia, 2016). To that end, I have selected the following moments, as illustrated in Chart 3.6 (below). The first critical juncture is the moment when the losers joined Bologna. Hence, to address my first research question (*Why did the losers join Bologna*?) I focus on the period between the early 1990s up to 2003, looking at this process from both the international and national level. I start from an international perspective, focusing on the developments at three Bologna ministerial conferences in 1998 in Paris, where this process was born; in 1999 in Bologna, where Lithuania adopted this agenda; and in 2003 in Berlin where Albania became a member. Then, I discuss the political, social, and economic context in both countries at the time of taking the decision to jump on the bandwagon. In chapter 5 I provide an account of the political developments in the early 1990s, and the dominant consensus of that time, which led to the decision to embrace this policy agenda in 1999 (Lithuania) or 2003 (Albania).

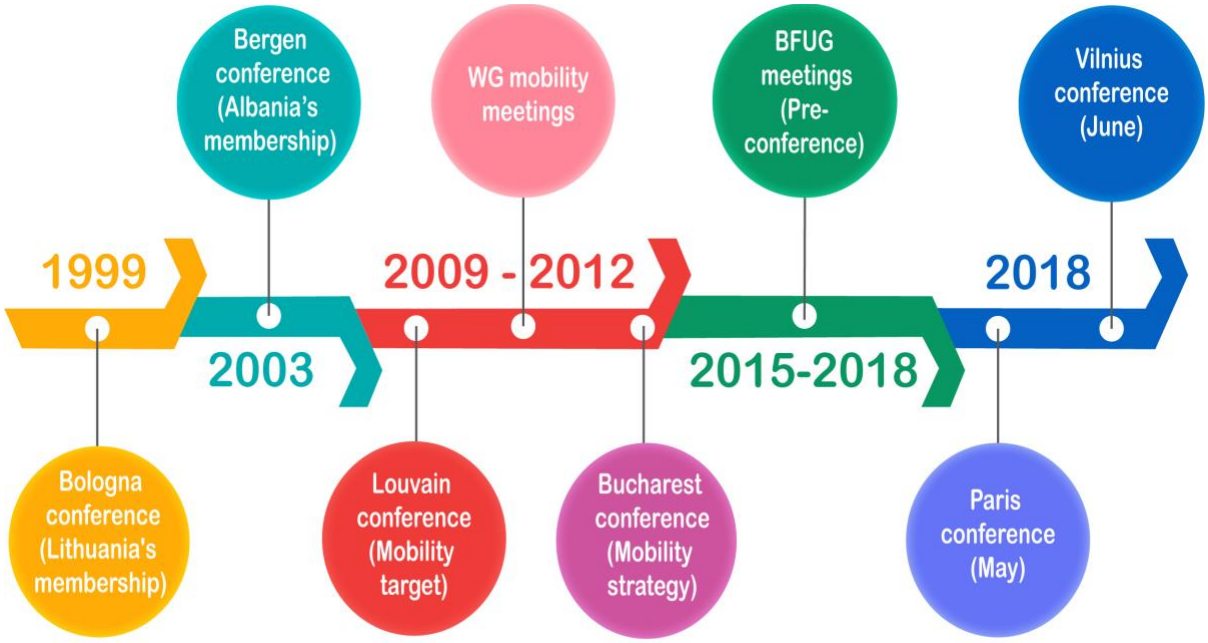


Chart 3.6 the critical junctures of the Bologna path, that I have studied

To address my second research question (*why do they stay in this cooperation*?) I focus on two other critical junctures: (a) the Louvain conference of 2009, when the first deadline of

Bologna was reached, and members committed to another decade of reforms. This moment is important to shed light on the motives of the losers to extend their commitment to this process (instead of *exiting* it), despite the evidence of losing. (b) the Paris conference of 2018, when countries celebrated the 20th anniversary of this process, which was an opportunity for the losers to gauge their losses and ponder the costs and benefits of being in this cooperation.

To address my third research question (*Why do they not voice their discontent*?), I focus on two time-segments (i.e. 2009 to 2012 and 2015 to 2018) which provided the losers with a series of choice nodes (see chapter 1). The time segment between the conferences of Louvain (2009) and Bucharest (2012), is when the Bologna's strategy on student mobility was decided. However, although one of the losers (Armenia) was leading the Working Group (WG) on Mobility, while another (Albania) was co-chairing the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG), they did not make the Mobility Strategy 2020 reflect their interests on imbalanced mobility (see chapter 7). Thus, studying these meetings of the WG and the BFUG sheds light on the role of losers in this cooperation, and their motives to stay loyal to a process that they cannot control.

The next time segment, between the ministerial conferences of Yerevan (2015) and Paris (2018), is important to shed light on the preparatory work that was being done by country delegations and the BFUG regarding the ministerial conference of 2018. It is during this time when the BFUG sets the agenda for the ministerial conference, by elevating or dropping issues out of the *communique* that is later adopted by the ministers. Moreover, I attended the Paris conference, which is important in understanding the interaction of national actors at the international stage. Finally, the period after the conference is important to elucidate the way in which this policy agenda travels from the ministerial conference to the local contexts, and how local resources are mobilised to implement it. To that end, I travelled to Rome, where the Bologna headquarters moved after the conference; to Tirana, where I could follow the work of the Albanian delegation; and to Vilnius, where I attended a Bologna follow-up conference.

These moments and sites have been vital in addressing my research puzzle, by shedding light on the interaction of national actors on the international stage, as well as the processes through which this policy agenda gets decided, and then is mediated to the national contexts.

c. Documentary sources

In this study, documents are understood as written materials that take many forms, including laws and official orders, strategies and declarations, official reports, statistical records, minutes of meetings and official correspondence (see Bailey, 1994; Silverman, 1993). Newspaper articles, including issues of the official gazettes, are understood and analysed as documents, although discussed here as a distinctive category. As illustrated in Chart 2. (above), I analysed 142 newspaper articles, 179 official documents, and statistical records produced by national offices of statistics in Albania and Lithuania (e.g. Albanian Institute of Statistics [INSTAT] and Lithuanian Institute of Statistics [Statistics Lithuania]), as well as statistics produced by international institutions such as Unesco, OECD, World Bank, Eurostat and Eurostudent (see the full list of documents and newspapers in Appendices 3.11 and 3.12).

As with other sources of data, documentary validity is not assumed, but they are placed under scrutiny for authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Scott, 1990). That means that special efforts are made to obtain documents from trustworthy official sources; investigate their content to make sure that they are not deliberately distorted; check if they are typical of their kind; and understand them in the context in which they are produced.

After checking the validity of the documentary sources, I have grouped them in categories:

1. **International level** (**1.a.** Bologna **1.b**. Other IOs): Bologna declarations (including drafts), international strategies, reports, minutes of the meetings and official correspondence, statistical records.
2. **National level** (**2.a.** Albania **2.b.** Lithuania): laws, bylaws, directives, national strategies, reports, presentations, speeches, and correspondence, statistical records.

As explained in chapter 1, the focus of this study is not on international organisations. However, I started my fieldwork by collecting documents from the Bologna Secretariat headquarters in Paris, aiming to understand the institutional norms in which countries like Albania and Lithuania operate, and respond to. Similarly, I analysed the core policy texts of

Bologna, such as communiques and strategies, trying to grasp to what extent they represented the interests of the losers. For instance, in trying to understand why the Mobility Strategy does not represent the losers' interests, I have collected documents (e.g. presentation materials, agendas, and minutes) from the meetings of the BFUG and WG on Mobility, that prepared the strategy. Furthermore, I have analysed EU documents related to Albania and Lithuania (e.g. SA Agreements, and EC reports), which helped me gauge the impact of the EU integration process in their decision to be in this cooperation.

After I had a better understanding of the international stage where the losers operate, I moved to collect documents at the national level. Initially, I visited official websites of relevant institutions (e.g. Ministry of Education, agencies, and the EHEA) where I could access most of the critical documents relevant to my study. Then, I visited the physical offices of the ministries of education, relevant agencies, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in both countries. I also sent written requests for information, which granted me access to additional documents (MoE, nr.4608/1, 30.09.2020; QSHA, 2607/1, 08.09.2020).

The preliminary list of documents was updated as the research progressed. In some cases, my informants provided me with relevant documents (e.g. speeches, memories, notes, reports, and drafts of official documents) and visual evidence (e.g. photos). In other times, they mentioned a document, which I looked for after the interview.

As mentioned above, I have collected newspaper articles and other publications, because of my interest in understanding how these policies are discussed, criticised and legitimised in the public discourse (see Bryman, 2008; Jessop, Fairclough, & Wodak, 2008). I was granted access to the archives of the National Library of Albania, where I could scan old publications. I started with the monthly Gazette of the Ministry of Education in Albania, "Mesuesi", which represents the official voice of the ministry. For instance, image 1 (below) shows how it heralded the country's membership in Bologna, one day before the Berlin conference.



MESUESI

E MERKURE
17 shtator 2003
Viti XLIII i Botimit
Nr.28 (2302)
Çmimi: 25 lekë
Numri i parë:
1 shtator 1961

ARSIMORE -KULTURORE Botim i Ministrisë së Arsimit dhe Shkencës

Shkodër

Kryeministri Nano dhe Ministri Memushi përuruan rikonstruksionet e tri shkollave

-Bëhet realitet nisma "Biznesi dhe shkollat e Veriut të Shqipërisë-

Lexo në faqen 2

Për një sistem arsimor, që përgatit ndryshime dhe i përshtatet zhvillimit të shoqërisë

- Përshëndetje e Ministrit të Arsimit dhe Shkencës, prof. dr. Luan MEMUSHI me rastin e 15 shtatorit, ditës së parë të vitit mësimor 2003-2004-

Nxënësit e 8-vjeçares filluan me tekste falas

Vazhdon me ritme të përshpejtuara shpërndarja e teksteve

Viti i parë i arsimit të mesëm të përgjithshëm

Seminare

Image 3.1 The official Gazzette “Mesuesi”. Issue of 17.09.2003

Then, I scanned two of the largest daily newspapers in Albania, Panorama and Shekulli. But if for “Mesuesi” I scanned the monthly issues, spanning over a period of about 11 years (1999 to 2010), for the daily newspapers I only scanned daily issues for three years (2002 to 2005), which was the time right before and after Bologna membership, and Bologna was still an issue widely discussed in public.

Every article was coded and grouped into the following categories:

a. *Information*, which included articles containing information on Bologna, student mobility or higher education (e.g. reporting a project or event)
b. *Opinions*, which included opinion pieces on Bologna, higher education or student mobility. This was usually referring to a debate of the time or a new initiative for which actors had different opinions. Bologna was either the topic of the article or used as a tool to support or attack an argument.

Additionally, I analysed other publications, including papers issued by academics in both countries, to understand how they discuss Bologna and the relevant issues. For instance, in chapter 6 I have used quotations from these publications, where Lithuanian researchers present high outward mobility as a force of nature, whereas Albanian academics choose to blame national authorities for shortcomings related to the Bologna’s policy agenda.

d. Actors

As discussed in chapter 2, in this study institutions are seen as central in understanding actors’ behaviour, but they are not analysed on deterministic terms, as passive recipients. Instead,

they are understood to have the agency to defend their interests by operating at three levels: supranational, national and subnational (see chapter 6).

Although the distinction between these levels is not an easy task, for the purpose of analysis, I discuss them separately, starting with the international level. For instance, I have interviewed one of the founders of Bologna, two-country representatives in the BFUG, and one leader of an international interest group. They have helped me understand better the international environment where the losers operate and negotiate their national interests.

Secondly, I have focused on national governments, interviewing formal representatives who shed light on the institutional norms and the political culture that underpin the policymaking process. For instance, seeking to answer why the losers are in this cooperation, I interviewed actors who are legally responsible for their country's participation in Bologna, such as seven ministers of education, including the ministers who applied for their country's membership. However, in this study, I also take note of recent developments in the way politics is done, which is marked by a shift from government to governance (Bevir, 2012). As new actors enter the education policy field and are given governing responsibilities, the boundaries of what is government and what is not become blurred (Luhtakallio & Eliasoph, 2014). To that end, I have identified actors whose political power is not defined by their formal role in the governing hierarchy, but by their role in policymaking, which are referred to as the 'action elite' (Carter & Lawn, 2015). I identified them through preliminary document analysis. Moreover, employing a purposeful sampling with a snowball technique (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), I invited my interviewees to nominate other potential informants. This strategy allowed me to identify and approach people who operate backstage, as well as to check my progress in exhausting all key sources. For instance, I conducted more interviews in Albania, because, in this country, interviewees kept nominating other key informants who had played a significant role in the process. In sum, I interviewed one vice-minister and one advisor to the PM who had presented the country in the ministerial conferences; five MPs who had played a key role in drafting the national legislation related to Bologna reforms; and six government officials who have played a crucial role in steering their respective country towards Bologna

reforms, even before membership. Part of this group were also three policy agents whose primary role has been to 'borrow' and translate Bologna policies to the country level (see Steiner-Khamsi, 2012; Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000).

The third group are stakeholders who operate at the subnational level. As discussed in chapter 2, Neo-pluralists argue that policy domains are governed by policy elites, which are composed, *inter alia*, by representatives of interest groups (McFarland, 2010). Thus, understanding why these interests groups, who might be affected, do not resist this policy agenda, sheds light on my third research question (Why the losers do not voice their discontent?). Accordingly, I have identified, mapped and interviewed 11 university leaders (6 public HEIs, and 5 private), eight academics and researchers, 16 students, one employer, five activists and one journalist.

In terms of composition, I strove to obtain a research sample that is balanced on features that might influence their responses (Flick, 2014), which I have identified as: the educational experience, the role played in the process, and their position towards the EU. Given that my sample was not random, I tried to balance it as my data collection progressed. For example, when I realised that I had more interviews with people educated abroad, in the next interviews within the same category (e.g. academics) I made special efforts to interview someone who never studied abroad. However, as I said above, my main priority has been to interview people who play a key role in the process, or who had valid information about it.

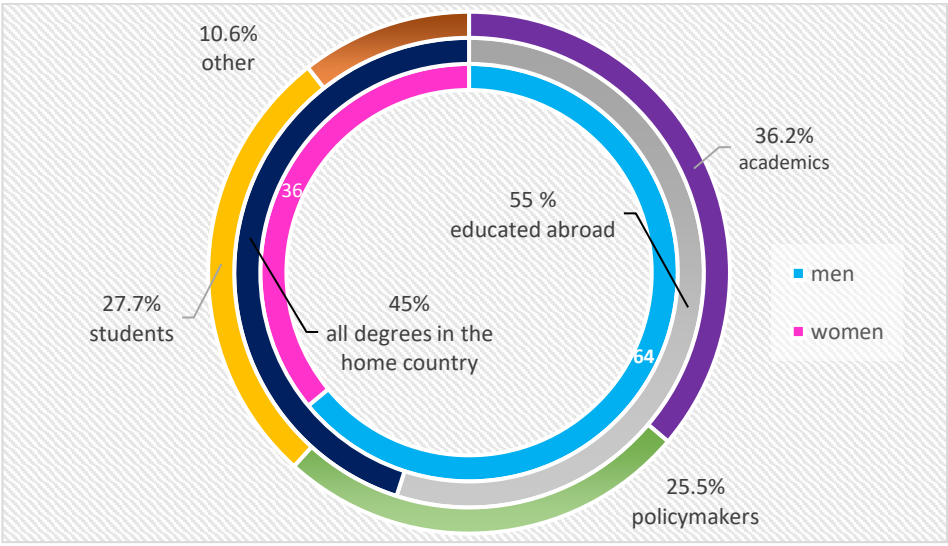


Chart 3.7 the composition of my informants, based on the information given in the questionnaire

Consequently, as can be seen, by Chart 3.7 (first circle) my sample is balanced in terms of categories discussed above: 25.5% of them were policymakers, 36.2% university leaders and academics, 27.7% students and the remaining 10 % activists, journalists, and employers. Similarly, it is balanced in terms of education experiences (Chart 3.7 second circle), where almost half of my interviewees (55.3%) had acquired one or more degrees abroad, whereas the other half had completed their education in the home country. This percentage was lower among policymakers (50 %), but the majority of them had their children studying abroad (see chapter 6). As discussed in the empirical chapters, those who were educated abroad were more likely to present themselves as Europhiles (57.7%), but when it came to the dichotomy Western-Soviet education system, there was a wide consensus, with 90.7 % declaring to be in favour of the Western Education model. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 5, it was challenging to identify actors who would publicly endorse the Soviet model in Higher Education, even if they expressed a tendency towards Euroscepticism.

Finally, Chart 3.7 (third circle), shows that my research sample may have an over-representation of men (63.8%), which might be due to the high number of men in key governmental positions. Indeed, analysed separately, the percentage is lower for the academic group (60.8%), but it is still an overrepresentation of men in the population of academics in Albania, where they account for 45.5% (RASH, 2020). Nevertheless, my data analysis does not suggest that responses are in any way dependent on informants' gender.

3.4 The research methods

In this ethnographic study, I use a range of research methods to collect evidence, such as interviews, observation and documentary analysis (Schatz, 2009; Tilly, 2006; Scott, 1998). These methods are essential in addressing my research puzzle in a convincing way by capturing the fluid nature of the processes this study addresses (see Peck, 2012, p.24).

Moreover, although I discuss data collection and data analysis separately, they have developed in an iterative process (Huberman et al., 2013). Thus, the data collection process

is followed by data analysis, and after drawing some conclusions, I have gone back to collecting additional data to test them, as illustrated in the diagram below (Chart 3.8).

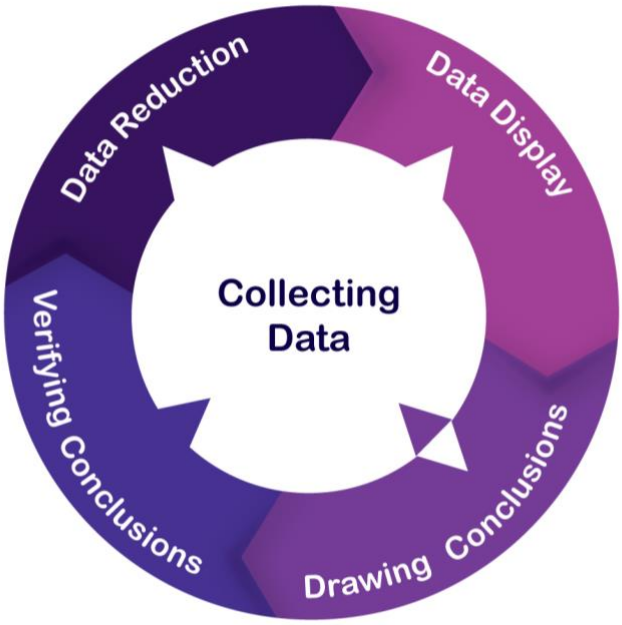


Chart. 3.8 The iterative process of data analysis

a. Interviews

Interviews are widely used in political ethnography, for they can access the 'black-box' of decision-making, which might not be possible through other methods, while also providing a medium for constructing and reconstructing meaning through 'dialogue and digging' (Peck, 2012, p.26). Accordingly, for this study, I have conducted 47 in-depth interviews with 54 informants. Two interviews were conducted over the phone; one was conducted in Rome, seven in Paris, 10 in Vilnius, 27 in Tirana. Only one key informant was interviewed twice, before and after the Paris conference. One interview was conducted simultaneously with two researchers, and another was a group interview with six students. I also had e-mail correspondence with four informants (see the interview list in Appendix 3.2). Overall, I had a good response rate, with only three refusals: two in Albania and one in Lithuania.

I contacted my interviewees directly (via e-mail). In Lithuania, I collaborated with two gatekeepers: (i) a university professor, with a rich social network that helped me identify and approach key informants; (ii) an administrative staff member at Vilnius university, who was very keen to help me identify and access key documents. In Albania, I could rely on my own understanding of the country and my social network (see Section 5, on potential biases).

In terms of research instruments, I prepared two interview schedules: one for policymakers and one for interest groups (see Appendices 3.7 and 3.8). Both are composed of open questions and developed in a branch-and-tree model following my three research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The questions were designed to excavate the actors' understanding of reality. Moreover, aiming to identify path-reproducing mechanisms, they sought to identify mental maps that are used to filter out the outcomes of this policy agenda.

Regarding the locations, two interviews were conducted over the phone, whereas the rest were conducted face-to-face, in a place of the informant's choice. I preferred an informal place (a café) rather than their offices, which I found helpful in balancing the power relations and making them more open to sharing key information. However, this was not always an option.

A typical interview started with a relaxed conversation, aiming to build a social rapport. I was aware of keeping this short conversation away from the topics of the interview so that I would avoid expressing my opinions on the matter, and in so doing contaminating the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Longhurst & Zealand, 2009; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1995). Then, I gradually moved to the topic of the study, by signalling with a generic question on Bologna. With policymakers, it was a retrospective question: "When did you first hear about Bologna?". Then I moved on to asking them about their decisions and actions related to joining and remaining in Bologna. I asked if they ever made a cost-benefit analysis, and what took precedence, but I also challenged them to think of alternative paths that could have been taken in critical junctures. For instance, I asked them what would have happened if they never joined Bologna, or delayed their membership application, aiming to explore if they ever saw any viable alternative to Bologna. I also asked if they ever voiced their discontent in the Bologna events, and if not, why? Then I moved on to the issue of mobility and what do countries gain and lose from it. I also invited them to reflect on the success of this process in fulfilling their expectations. When they said that it did not (which is what most of them said), I asked why so, aiming to understand how they make sense of failure and whom do they hold accountable. Then, I explored the impact of the Europeanisation drive in the decision to be in

this cooperation. I ended the interview with a call to reflect on the role that universities should play in society, aiming to probe where did they stand in relation to the ideology and discourse of the Knowledge-Based Economy. As I discuss in the empirical chapters, this question allowed me to identify a discrepancy between the 'global speak' (chapter 2) that they employed and the deep-seated beliefs that they had about the role of education in society.

As for the interest groups, after the warming up discussion, the typical interview started with a general question like "What are your thoughts on Bologna?", Just to open up a door into the discussion about it, but also to see how critical they were of the process. Then I moved on to questions about the role that their group had played when the country joined Bologna, and the role it was playing now. If they were happy with this policy, I tried to understand what made they happy with a policy that did not represent the interests of their group, and when they were critical about it, I explored the obstacles they faced to voice their discontent in public.

However, these schedules acted just as guidelines to help me navigate the interview, but I did not follow them strictly. Indeed, I tailored each interview to the informant's role, the position of power and level of information. For instance, I asked one of the four founders of Bologna about their motives of inviting countries like Albania to join this initiative; and asked the Albanian minister, who co-chaired the BFUG, if they used their formal position to update their country's interests into the common policy agenda. In general, I let the interview flow, allowing the informant to lead the discussion, and intervening with follow-up questions.

At the end of each interview, I invited my informants to complete a questionnaire, aiming to gather their opinions in a more structured way. It was organised into four groups of questions:

a. *Interviewees* - aiming to collect information on the informants, such as their experience of Europe, age, gender, work experience
b. *Information* - exploring how well did they know Bologna, and other EU programs, such as Erasmus
c. *Perceptions* – exploring their perception of Bologna, its costs and benefits for the country. For instance, they were asked to pick a word that best depicts Bologna, which sheds light on how they understand this process.
d. *Opinions* – unpacking their opinions on the situation with higher education, emigration and Europe. Here I offered a set of claims to respondents and asked them to express their agreement or disagreement on a five-item Likert scale.

In total, the questionnaire has a Likert scale with 13 sub-questions and eight closed questions and (Appendix 3.9). It also had a ten-item scale where informants could self-identify as Europhile or Eurosceptics and express their preference for the Western education model vis-à-vis Soviet education. As with the rest of the interview, the purpose has been to understand how actors want to present themselves, and why they do so. To illustrate, as they were answering the questions, I often engaged in a conversation with follow-up questions, inviting them to explain why they gave a particular answer, which allowed them to elaborate more on the issue. Hence, when I asked a minister in Albania where he stood towards the EU, he contemplated for a while and then told me to place it as "Europhile". When I asked "why?", he answered that it was not appropriate for a minister to be critical of the EU.

In terms of analysing the interviews, I use the analytic framework developed by Huberman, Miles and Saldana (2013), which starts with data reducing process (see documentary analysis in section c, below). Thus, I reduced the information acquired by 44 hours of transcribed interviews, by developing a list of codes (Appendix 3.10) which I used in NVivo. This process is developed in stages (Punch & Oancea, 2014). I started by coding the interviews around my research questions, (a) **loyalty** (b) **exit** (c) **voice** (Example in Appendix 3.15). As common patterns became to emerge, I drew inferences, developing the following categories:

(i) **Internal factors**, which I included sub-categories such as: interests, role (policy learning), EU identity, information, mind maps, common sense.

(ii) **External factors**, which included sub-categories, such as: institutions (norms and practices), political culture (value stability), legitimising discourse, path-dependence, the action elite

In analysing text, I employ the 'critical hermeneutics' model developed by Philips and Brown (1993), which encourages interpretation of the interviews in the context. To that end, for key interviews, I used a profile form to keep notes before and after the interview, on the profile of the interviewee and the situation in which the interview was conducted (see Appendix 3.6).

One key informant was interviewed twice: before and after the Paris conference. This decision was informed by my interest to see how they would make sense of the discrepancies between what they expected from the conference, and what was really achieved. Similarly, with two

other informants, I exchanged some follow-up e-mails, to clarify their position on certain key issues, which were unclear from the content of the interview.

Finally, I do not take interviewees' claims at face value. I am aware that elite interviews, in particular, are susceptible to 'agent inflation' effect (Peck, 2012, p.26), which means that actors engage in the reconstruction of events, by exaggerating their role, vision, and rationality. Therefore, I apply the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (Ricoeur, 1970), which entails testing claims against evidence collected through other research methods (see Schatz, 2009). To illustrate, one policy-maker claimed that the staff in the ministry and academics who applied Bologna were totally uninformed when the country applied for membership, in 2003*[4]:

> There has been no analysis, no debate, nothing…people always speak without thinking, based only on labels and names… remember what I am about to say: Over 90% of the academic staff in Albania do not know what Bologna is. Mark my words and I take full responsibility for these words.

However, these claims were not supported by the evidence presented in chapter 6. For instance, there are several official documents showing the preparatory work done by the ministry, while several universities were piloting the process for several years, before the membership application (Orders of Minister, nr.799, 11.07.01; 19.06.01; 25.02.02). Moreover, there are multiple accounts of study trips of academics and policymakers, going to other countries to study how to implement Bologna (Hajderi, 2002; Mesuesi, 09.10.2002; Peshkepia, 2001). Similarly, there is evidence of conferences being organised in Albania with academics and university leaders around the time that the country joined Bologna (e.g. the Conference of Balkans' Rectors, 04.12.2004).

Thus, quotations from my interviews do not simply provide facts, but also illustrate my analysis and bring the voice of the research participants into the study (see Appendix 3.13).

b. Observation

In this study, I use observation, which allowed me to experience political processes directly, rather than accessing a filtered version through documents or testimonies of others (Tilly,

[4] I am not sharing more details on the author of this quotation, for ethical reasons.

2006, p.410). Through observation, I could observe practices and processes as they happened, where they happened (Baiocchi & Connor, 2008, p.144). That is then presented through research vignettes, to provide the reader a full and vivid picture of the relevant interactions (Hughes & Huby, 2012; Barter & Renold, 2010).

As discussed in chapter 2, in this study power is understood to be exercised not only directly – "the first face of power" (Dahl, 1957), but also by limiting the capacities of other actors to challenge the ruling consensus – "second face of power" (Barach & Baratz, 1970), and even by manipulating actors' preferences to become in line with the interests of powerful actors – "three-dimensionality of power" (Lukes, 2005). As Pierson (2004, p.37) argues, through agenda setting and ideological manipulation, powerful actors make conflict unnecessary, disguising power asymmetries as consensus. Thus, striving to unpack the consensus around this policy agenda, I attended two Bologna conferences where I could observe the institutional norms and social cues to which actors respond.

I started by observing "little things" (Thrift, 2000), which are often missed by other research methods, such as choices about the venue, the configuration of the room and the agenda of the meeting. As shown in chapter 7, these mundane choices have the power to limit the capacities of actors to participate in the debate and voice criticism. As Eliasoph (1998) argues, 'extra-linguistic' rules are important, for they define who should speak and what is an appropriate way of speaking. Congruently, the stakeholders in the Paris conference were not expected to participate in the discussion, for they were placed behind the ministers and did not have direct access to microphones. Similarly, these choices have the power to communicate messages about roles and identities. For instance, the conference in Vilnius resembled a classroom, where the international speakers, standing next to a whiteboard, 'taught' the national audience how to implement Bologna.

Secondly, in trying to explain my research puzzle, I have observed how actors interact with and respond to global agendas that travel to the local contexts. As I explain in chapter 7, I followed the Albanian delegation at the Paris conference. I contacted them in writing before

the conference and stayed with them from the moment they arrived in Paris until they left the city. During these three days, I stayed with them during the conference, as well as in their spare time, while they were visiting museums and pubs. By following country delegations in the Paris conference, I managed to observe how they respond to criticism for not doing enough to implement Bologna; how they refrain from voicing in public, the discontent that they share in private; and how they promote their role in these events to the audiences at home.

On the other hand, although I could not follow the Lithuanian delegation with the same intensity, I could still observe and interview them during the conference. Moreover, during my fieldwork in Vilnius, I could meet again and socialise with the youngest members of the delegation. Indeed, being given a desk at Vilnius University, I had a chance to interact with the academic community, attend events, engage in conversations, and socialise with them. One example is the conference on Bologna, organised in Vilnius, where a delegation of international actors came to promote what was achieved at the Paris conference. As I explain in chapter 7, during this event, I could experience the social pressure of asking the 'wrong' questions and being perceived as critical of the ruling consensus.

In sum, the opportunity to ‘live’ the experiences described by my informants, and my socialisation with them, has given me access to their worldviews, as well as their understanding of Bologna and their role in this cooperation. It allowed me to understand why they do what they do by experiencing their reality. For instance, I could have a better understanding of their willingness to comply and their reluctance to refrain from voicing criticism in public, after my episode in the Vilnius conference.

In terms of reporting, the nature of the events and their dynamics made it impossible for me to keep notes all the time. However, although all subjects were informed about my research and my role in the events, I did not record informal conversations for ethical reasons, but also because I was concerned that I could disrupt the informal and friendly tone of the conversations. Thus, when I could not keep jotted notes on my smartphone, I kept “memory notes” (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). That is, I memorised details of actions,

behaviours, conversations and other non-verbal cues during conversations. Then, at least twice a day, I kept audio notes describing everything I had observed. Additionally, I took a lot of pictures, recorded videos and audio of speeches and presentations delivered at the conferences. On top of that, I drew sketches of rooms and drew mind maps that helped me later in constructing a storyline of what happened and how it happened.

c. Documentary analysis

As discussed above, this ethnographic research combines observation and in-depth interviewing with documentary analysis. All these methods have developed as complementary to each other, to increase access to data sources, but also to increase the validity of findings. Returning to the concept of 'critical hermeneutics', in interpreting documents I have considered the context in which they are produced (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997), and therefore I have sought to interview the authorities that have produced the document, and actors affected by them.

As discussed in chapter 2, in this study policy is understood as discourse, but also as text (Mundy et al., 2016; Taylor et al. 1997; Ball, 1993). As such, documents are interpreted as expressing a set of ideas and as underpinned by power relations (Saurugger, 2013). As such, documents are no less susceptible than interviews to distortion, and therefore they may represent the view that is in line with the interests of powerful actors or akin to the worldview. Thus, analysing them in conjunction with other sources of data becomes of vital importance.

Many authors argue that data analysis is a process of bringing order to a vast amount of data, which starts with data reduction and then analysing emerging patterns which allows us to draw conclusions (Punch & Oancea, 2014, Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Tesch, 1990). Similarly, Huberman et al., (2013) have summarised the following components of data analysis: (i) Data reduction, (ii) Data display and (iii) Drawing conclusions (iv) testing conclusions (Chart 3.8).

Therefore, as with the interview transcripts, I created categories organised around my research questions, and I coded the content of the documents to condense the data without losing valuable information. An example is given in Appendix 3.14, where I have traced the development of the Mobility Strategy for the EHEA 2020, comparing various drafts as the document is amended to reflect the debates in the WG Mobility meetings. Afterwards, as some patterns started emerging, I started writing descriptive texts and drawing diagrams, as can be seen from the charts that are used across the thesis (e.g. see image 3.2).

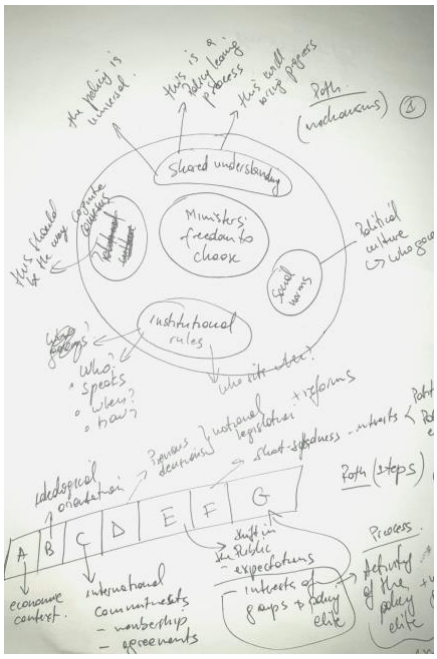


Image 3.2: Initial sketches of Chart 8.1, drawn during data analysis process

To illustrate, Chart 6.1 in chapter 6, is the output of a long analytical process, which started with a careful analysis of several higher education laws in both countries, in order to study the formal powers of key actors, such as academics, university leaders and students. Then, I analysed their role in the historical context, checking for traces of political legacy from the previous regime. Moreover, I analysed their official websites, their media presence, and documents produced by them, or where they are mentioned (e.g. country reports and strategies). After I had a good understanding of them, I arranged in-depth interviews with their leaders (e.g. leaders of ESU and LSS), their members (e.g. members of the LSS) and outsiders (e.g. focus group with students). Moreover, during the interviews, I asked them to share with me other documents while collecting additional evidence to confirm the preliminary conclusions. That brought me back to data collection phase, which continued until I had eliminated alternative explanations and had collected enough evidence in support of my conclusions (see Huberman et al., 2013 for the concept of 'analytic induction').

Additionally, I used an *auxiliary outcome test*, which means that when I found that private universities were not influencing the government's behaviour towards Bologna, I sought for evidence where they had done so for other higher education policies (Mahoney, 2010).

Finding evidence that they did the latter, guided me to dig further in understanding what was holding them back in the Bologna context.

3.5 Generalisation of the findings (Validity and reliability)

Some authors have argued that Political Ethnography and qualitative methods, in general, are in a disadvantaged position concerning generalisation (Burawoy, 1998). Therefore, many political scientists use it in conjunction with other research methods, to increase the validity of the findings (Schatz, 2009; Bayard de Volo & Schatz, 2004; Laitin, 1998). Congruently, in this study, I have used methodological triangulation technique, by using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to gauge the same concepts (Denzin, 1970). For instance, after my in-depth interviews, I administered a questionnaire with my informants, making sure that I could measure the same concepts with different instruments. The findings of both interviews were cross-checked with information obtained through observation and documentary analysis. Moreover, I have also managed to achieve triangulation of sources by collecting data from more than two independent sources, and by selecting sources whose biases might complement each other (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 2013).

Secondly, as discussed in section 3, I have taken several steps in selecting representative cases of the losers (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 2013). Indeed, Gerring (2012) argues that that external validity of findings and their generability relies on selecting a good representative sample. However, even in their own right, these case studies provide additional insights in understanding the behaviour of nation-states at the international level, and a set of political processes, and actors, who, by operating backstage, manage to shape state's preferences and actions. In doing so, I believe I am contributing to a better understanding of political processes and actors, and therefore push the general understanding of politics forward.

Thirdly, as discussed in section 4, I have taken several steps to ensure the internal reliability of the instruments I use (Bryman, 2008). For instance, the Likert scale that I use in the questionnaire contains different articulations for the same questions (May & Perry, 2012), as can be seen by the comparison of questions Q.4 with Q.6.13 (Appendix 3.9). Accordingly, the

split-half test (Cronbach's) of the questionnaire showed an internal consistency of 0.829, which indicates a very reliable instrument (see Field, 2013).

Similarly, the instruments for in-depth interviews were designed according to the "seven stages of interview validity" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Furthermore, all instruments were piloted with some colleagues, after they were discussed with my supervisors. The piloting phase helped me clarify the way in which questions were articulated, as well as to check the consistency among the instruments (see Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Fourthly, I have taken additional measures, such as feedback validation. For instance, after the Paris conference, I shared my observation notes with two other researchers who attended the conference, cross-checking my findings, such as the lack of criticism or resistance of the losers during the conference. Overall, there were no discrepancies among our notes, but we could complement each other's observations with new insights. Furthermore, I have shared my preliminary findings with some accessible research participants, inviting them to provide feedback, clarify any misconception and elaborate further (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

I have also taken additional measures to tackle some challenges related to language. When I have conducted interviews in languages other than English, I have made sure to apply the back-translation technique (see Appendix 3.1). The procedure consists of translating the quotations to English and then giving them to another person to translate them back to the original language. Afterwards, the original quotation is compared to the one that is translated twice (see Grunwald & Goldfarb, 2006). I administered this process with a colleague who helped to translate quotations from English back to Albanian. Very few discrepancies were noted between the original Albanian quotations and the translated ones. In these cases, I worked again on the translation, to bring it even closer to the original meaning.

Finally, I move away from the positivist pretence of neutrality of the researcher from the object of their observation (Patton, 2004), or the neopositivist optimism that objective impartiality can be achieved (Jackson, 2008). As England (1994, p.84) succinctly puts it:

> We do not parachute into the field with empty heads and a few pencils or a tape-recorder in our pockets ready to record the "facts."

Indeed, the political ethnography literature highlights the role of the researcher as a key actor or instrument of data gathering and interpretation (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Delamont, 2013; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Researchers, in this approach, are acknowledged to be part of the world which they are observing, and by observing events, they may change what they are trying to observe. Hence, the use of reflexive “I” to remind the reader about the lack of distance between myself and the observed reality.

However, since I appreciate that the researcher and the social world influence one another, I have reflected on my observation point and possible biases brought to the study, especially in studying my own society (see for example May, 2011). To that end, I have been conscious about my biography, and the relationship between myself, as an observer, and the observed (see May & Perry, 2012 on “Reflexivity”). Thus, by understanding myself, I can use it as a medium to understand the reality that I observe (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Smith, 1988).

Moreover, as discussed above, I have combined observation and interviews with other research methods, such as documentary analysis, which offer a greater distance between the researcher and the sources of information. Again, even that does not guarantee neutrality, because documents are often produced with the audience in mind (see Atkinson & Coffey 2004) for “documents reality”). On top of that, documents are to be analysed through the analytical framework of the researcher, where they might get new and different meanings.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This study is designed and carried out with the responsibility in mind of representing myself, my institution, and the political science researcher. To that end, it is developed in full compliance with BERA's (2011) ethical guidelines and the UK Data Protection Act (1998). Accordingly, it has received ethical clearance by CUREC of the University of Oxford.

To ensure the informed consent of every research participant, I have taken the following steps. Firstly, I have addressed each of them with a written invitation (Appendix 3.3) and sent them an information sheet (Appendix 3.4) prior to our interview date. The information sheet contains enough information about me, this study, and the way in which the data will be handled. To

make sure that they read it, I handled each of them an additional copy before we started our interview. Then I asked every research participant to sign a consent form (Appendix 3.5) and asked for their permission to use my audio recorder (see Howe and Moses, 1999). Being very mindful about power relations, I made sure that none of the interviewees was nominated or invited to the interview by someone who was in a position of authority over them (see Oliver, 2010). This was a precautionary measure to make sure that every research participant was free not only to participate in this study but also refuse to answer any of the questions or even withdraw at any time. Being sensitive about the research participants' privacy, which Siber (1985) describes as the ability to set boundaries and control how much information one wants to share, I reminded them that I could switch off my voice recorder whenever they wanted. In two occasions, my informants asked me to speak off-record, and on another occasion, I switched it because the informant was sharing sensitive and irrelevant personal information.

One of my biggest ethical challenges throughout this study has been to guarantee the anonymity of my research participants. Given their specific roles in this process, and the small population of actors involved makes it a very tough task. Nevertheless, I have taken some measures, starting from my special efforts in saving the interview documents (i.e. audios, transcripts and lists) in a secured folder, separated from the rest of the data. Every research participant in this study is referred by a code name, and I have made special efforts not to give information that would make it easier to identify them. For instance, I do not state if they are incumbent ministers, or former ministers, just to increase the population of potential informants. Other times, when I have to describe my research participants, I alter their personal information, such as their gender, or information about people related to them.

3.7 Conclusion

Drawing on the theoretical literature discussed in the previous chapter, here, I set out the overall justification for my research design. I have taken note of the extent to which institutional positioning and formal structures have emerged as significant in the data. Such an analytical framework reflects a wider concern to avoid binary divisions of thinking and approach, in which

actors are either determined by structures or seen as exercising agency. This is especially important in explaining a research puzzle where actors appear to act against their interests.

I have made the case that the Political Ethnography is better suited to address my research puzzle, for it has given me privileged access to the way in which actors see their reality and make sense of their actions, even if seen from a distance they appear to be acting irrationally. This methodology and the research methods that I have used, have enabled me to provide a *thick description* of institutional norms, human practices and social constructs that motivate action or inaction. Observation has given me access to human interaction and observes important decisions as they are taken, where they are taken. Similarly, in-depth interviews have allowed me to immerse within the culture I am studying, and explore in-depth the ways in which country representatives, understand their role in this process, and negotiate their national and international responsibilities. Documentary analysis has allowed me to collect reliable data that increase the validity of my research findings.

Moreover, I have described in a transparent way my data collection process, starting from the case selection and the sources of evidence. Then, I explain the data analysis process, focusing on the measures that I have taken to increase the validity of my findings, where I emphasise the data triangulation technique, and the high consistency of my research instruments and across methods that I have used in this study. Afterwards, I discuss the impossible task to separate the researcher from what is researched but explain to the reader the measures that I have taken to mitigate that effect. I conclude with an open discussion on my ethical challenges, explaining all the precatory measures that I have taken to protect the privacy and anonymity of my research participants.

Chapter 4 –The emergence of acquiescent losers

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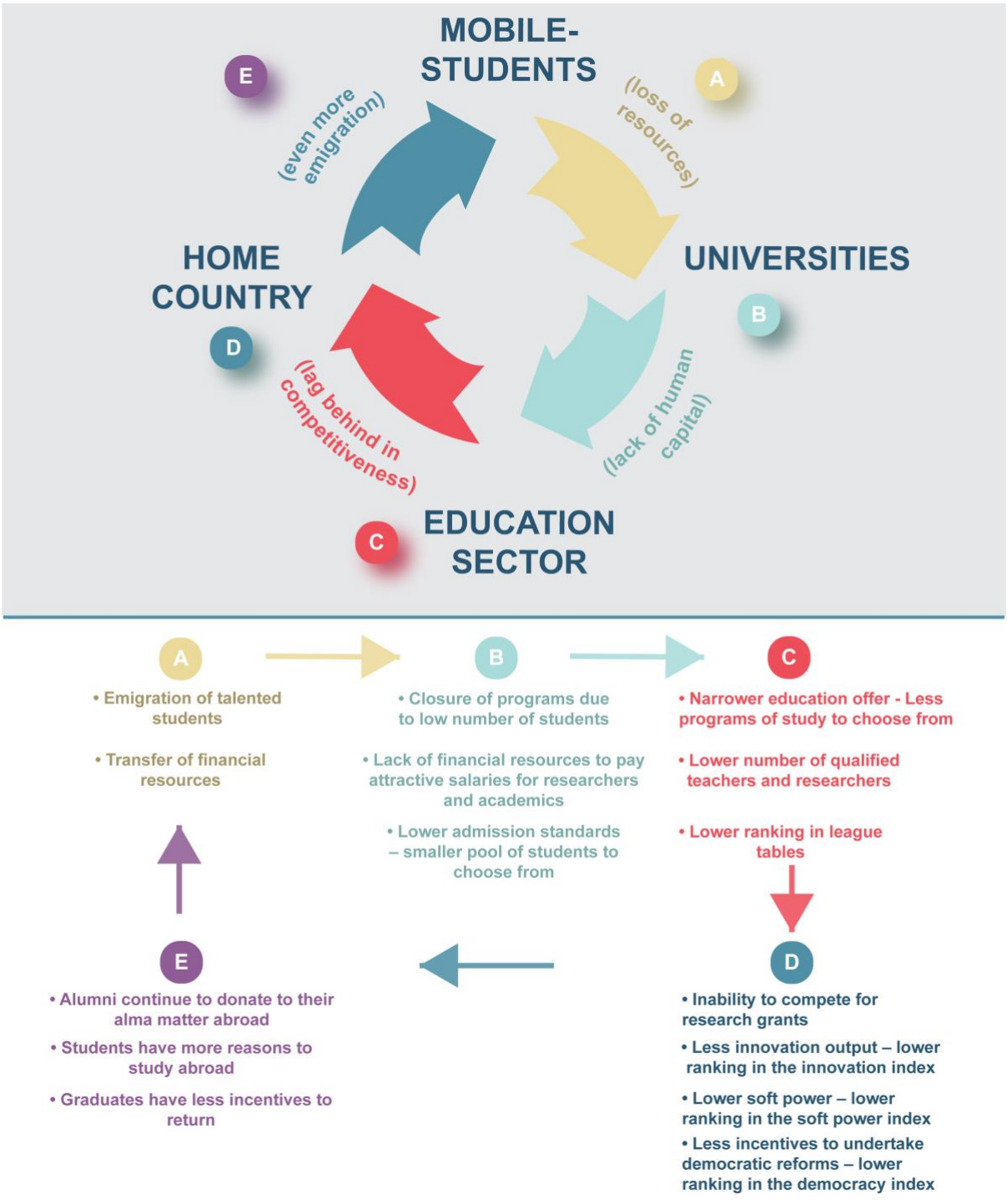
> Can something be done to stop the exodus of trained workers from poorer countries?
>
> (World Bank, 1995, p. 64)

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I discussed the theoretical framework that I use to approach my research puzzle and the methodological choices I have made to answer my research question. Here, I start presenting empirical evidence that this cooperation, although voluntary, is not welfare-promoting, contradicting the predictions of rational choice theories. The evidence presented in this chapter attempts to illustrate why the theoretical framework that I adopt is better suited to explain my research puzzle.

I start by analysing the ideology that underpins the Bologna process (henceforth Bologna) and the policy agenda that it promotes. I argue that its overarching goal to increase student mobility does not represent the interests of net-exporting countries and is even detrimental to those interests. To that end, I argue that this cooperation has the potential to create winners and losers. I also show that the losers have voluntarily chosen to join and remain in this cooperation, despite having other (probably more efficient and viable) alternatives. The reasons that have motivated such decisions are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters, but brief interpretations are offered here as the empirical data is presented.

I would like to reiterate the argument made in the introductory chapter, that I do not seek to isolate the impact of Bologna, that is, I do not treat it as an entity apart from other policy and contextual issues. Any attempt to do so is likely to fail, because, as I explain below, Bologna is part of a broader supranational policy agenda in higher education, underpinned by a set of neoliberal ideas. Hence, I primarily focus on the overarching policy goal of Bologna to promote higher degree mobility and discuss its ramifications for the losing countries. As illustrated in the infographic 4.1 (below) a negative net balance, has the potential to put the losers into a self-reproducing losing path, which would be difficult to reverse, because they will lose the very people they need to break this cycle.



Infographic 4.3 – The self-reproducing cycle of outward student mobility

The Bologna Process and student mobility

In this section, I analyse the policy agenda promoted by Bologna and discuss whose interests it represents. Then, I discuss how increased mobility contributes to the one-directional flow of students, which has led to unbalanced mobility between areas of the European continent. The second half of the chapter discusses the ramifications and long-term impact of imbalanced mobility and of the decision of the losers to jump on the bandwagon of Bologna.

a. The mobility agenda

As discussed in Chapter 1, Bologna developed in line with a broader ideology of internationalisation of higher education and a paradigm shift towards the Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE) (Knight, 2008; see also Maassen & Musselin, 2009). The overarching objective of this cooperation has been to increase mobility, by creating a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) without barriers to the mobility of students and academics; and to increase the attractiveness of European Higher Education to internationally mobile students (Moscovitz & Zahavi, 2019, p.8; Corbett, 2011)

> The Bologna Declaration of 1999 set the enhancement of student mobility as the major strategic objective of the reform… and the increase of student mobility was the single most important strategic objective. Other strategic objectives gained momentum in the Bologna Process over time, but increasing mobility remained an undisputed priority.
>
> (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011, p.21)

Although some authors (Ravinet, 2008) argue that the signatories of the Bologna declaration were not well informed about the long-term goals of this project, it has always been clear that the overarching goal of this process is to increase mobility. It its emphasised in the founding documents, such as the communiques issued in Sorbonne and Bologna in 1998 and 1999:

> [Creation of] a European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility… Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement, with particular attention to students.
>
> (The Bologna Declaration, 1999)

When I asked one of the founders of Bologna[5], to reflect on the greatest achievement of this process in the last twenty years, his/her reply was very quick and decisive:

[5] Interview with BP01 on 28.10.2019 in their office, in the capital of their country

"That there is mobility [now].". Similarly, in the Louvain communique (2009, p.4, para 18) mobility is considered as "the hallmark of the EHEA".

Congruently, Bologna policy texts emphasise the need to remove all obstacles to mobility, which led to the mobility strategy[6] published in the ministerial conference of Bucharest in 2012, in an attempt to coordinate joint efforts towards increasing mobility within the EHEA.

> Ministers reaffirmed that the objective of improving the mobility of students, teachers, researchers...is of the utmost importance. Therefore, they confirmed their commitment to pursue the **removal of all obstacles** to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff…"
>
> (The Prague Communique, 2001, emphasis added)

Obstacles to mobility were initially identified by the OECD in 1997. In one of the first issues of the "Education at a glance", are discussed "push" and "pull" factors to mobility, such as:

> …**language** barriers, the academic **reputation** of particular institutions... higher education provision in the home country... future **job opportunities**, cultural aspirations and government policies to facilitate **credit transfer** between home and host institutions. The **transparency** and flexibility of courses…
>
> (OECD, 1997, p.179-180, emphasis added)

As a consequence, the mobility strategy, as well as other Bologna strategic documents, strive to increase mobility through (i) removal of the existing obstacles (ii) encouragement of more students to study abroad, and (iii) promotion of virtual mobility. To that end, several interventions are proposed to tackle the following areas: (1) curricular obstacles and issues related to **the recognition** of qualifications (2) legal and administrative issues, related to **immigration** policies (3) **transparency** of the quality of studies (i.e. academic **reputation**) (4) foreign **language** skills of students and academics.

The first intervention, facilitating recognition of qualifications acquired abroad, has been one of the most distinctive features of Bologna. The aim has been to harmonise the degree structure and implement a credit transfer system, that would make academic qualifications easily understandable and comparable to international students and employers. To that end, all EHEA members have taken concrete steps to: (i) replace their existing national diplomas

[6] In the Bologna's documents, the mobility strategy is interchangeably referred to as "Mobility for better learning" or "Mobility Strategy 2020, for the European Higher Education Area."

with a standard three-cycle degree system (ii) establish a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and (iii) issue Diploma Supplements in a foreign language (EACEA, 2018).

> We hereby commit ourselves to encouraging a **common frame of reference**, aimed at improving **external recognition** and **facilitating student mobility** as well as employability.
>
> (Sorbonne Communique, 1998, pp. 2-3, emphasis added)
>
> Adoption of a system of **easily readable and comparable degrees**, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness...
>
> (Bologna Declaration, 1999, emphasis on the original text)

The second intervention has been to facilitate the visa regime for students and academics. The London ministerial conference (2007) placed facilitation of visas and work permits at the top of the common agenda (i.e. the top second priority, after recognition of foreign degrees).

> Among the obstacles to mobility, issues relating to immigration…We recognise the responsibility of individual Governments to facilitate the delivery of visas, residence and work permits...
>
> (London Communique, 2007, p.2)

The third intervention has been the transparency of the quality of studies. The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), is one of the first Bologna instruments to be established, showing the importance of this issue for the overall agenda (EHEA, 2020a). However, increasing the transparency of the quality of studies and improving the quality of studies are two different things. While the higher quality of studies might benefit the reputation of the HEIs in one given country, greater transparency does not necessarily ensure a better reputation. Indeed, it might sometimes mean quite the opposite, if countries and institutions fall down a vicious cycle where bad reputation and low quality reproduce each other. Transparency, however, is important for another thing: to facilitate mobility, by helping students to make informed choices, and eventually avoid low quality institutions, if they can.

> We will use quality assurance and transparency tools for promoting high-quality mobility inside and outside the EHEA. Transparency of structures and instruments and mutual trust in the higher education systems of all the EHEA countries are… a necessary prerequisite for mobility.
>
> (Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA, 2012, pp.3-4)

The fourth intervention is the investment of national governments in the improvement of the language skills of students. Countries were also encouraged by the Bologna policy texts to teach in English, from the elementary school onwards. The lack of ability to study in a foreign

language is consistently reported as a major obstacle to outward mobility (BFUG, 2009; Eurostudent, 2017). Hence, it is reasonable to expect that improving the foreign language skills of domestic students helps more of them to study abroad.

> As a prerequisite for mobility and internationalisation, we support the teaching of foreign languages at all levels, starting **from primary education**. We also strongly support the improvement of the language capabilities of teachers.
> (Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA, 2012, p.3, emphasis added)

In addition to these four policy interventions, which aim to remove obstacles to student mobility, Bologna's agenda requires from national governments to encourage higher outward mobility, through (5) mobility targets (6) financial support (7) information campaigns.

Thus, *the fifth* intervention is setting mobility targets. While governments are free to set both inward and outward mobility targets, Bologna strategic documents require governments "to include **only outward mobility** in [their] mobility target" (Mobility for better learning, 2012, p.1), which is currently set to be 20% by 2020 (Louvain communique, 2009). In other words, every EHEA member has pledged to encourage more than 20% of their domestic student population to study abroad, but they do not have target to attract more international students. The *sixth intervention* has been funding mobility with public funds. Bologna implementation reports have repeatedly identified the financial costs of studying abroad as the main deterrent to outward mobility (EACEA, 2018). Hence, Bologna strategic documents encourage national governments to provide financial incentives and support for their domestic students to study abroad. Indeed, the mobility strategy locates portability of grants at the head of measures to be taken by national governments (2012). Consequently, in the first decade of Bologna reforms, 38 of 47 members report having helped their outbound students financially through travel grants, study grants and publicly subsidised loans (EACEA, 2015).

> In order to reduce [obstacles to mobility], we [the governments of Bologna] intend to take the following measures: (1) As far as possible, to expand mobility funding and to enable a wide-reaching portability of grants, loans and scholarships provided by our countries…
> (Mobility for better learning, 2012, p.3)

To understand the aim of this policy intervention, might help the example of countries that allow portability of funds only for study programs that are not delivered in the home country.

They are coloured 'red' in the implementation maps, under the label "no portability", as if they did not provide any financial support at all to their outward mobile students (EACEA, 2018).

The *seventh* intervention is to inform more students about studying abroad and encourage them to do so, even if they were not thinking about it. Thus, in the Mobility Strategy 2020 document (2012, pp.1-5), governments pledge to "improve the communication of the individual, institutional and social benefits of periods spent abroad", to which end they are required to develop "strategies for information and promotion of mobility opportunities." The intention of this objective is probably better understood by reading the unrefined text of an early draft of the same document:

> Better prospects in the labour market are a particular incentive to spend a period of study abroad. We, therefore, want to start a concerted campaign…which focuses on the value of international experience and qualifications with regard to employability and professional opportunities in the labour market…to motivate more students to study or undertake an internship abroad.
>
> (WG Mobility, Working paper, 11th March 2011, pp.11-12)

Similarly, Bologna implementation reports encourage governments to follow the lead of those who are organising campaigns to encourage their students to study abroad.

> …campaigning and the provision of targeted information are necessary to convince more students to take a study period abroad.
>
> (BFUG, 2009, p.94)

> Improving information and the promotion of student mobility opportunities is crucial if obstacles linked to lack of information are to be tackled. Several countries have launched campaigns with the aim of motivating students to study abroad.
>
> (EACEA, 2015, p.254)

The last point is particularly interesting because it does not follow the non-interventionist tone so prominent in most Bologna documents. In contrast, in this text governments are required to actively promote outward mobility by altering students' preferences through discourse and incentives. It is worth noting that when the ministry and HEIs engage in promoting outward mobility, they contribute to a legitimation of this course of action and the overall perception that "life is elsewhere" (see Collier, 2013). Consequently, studying abroad turns in to a social norm, defining what is seen as *appropriate* for talented students. This phenomenon, which confirms the logic of appropriateness (chapter 2), has contributed to the emergence of

"mobility regimes" (Witzgall et al., 2013), in which ever more students study abroad from a sense of obligation, like that they have to, not because they want to (Petzold & Peter, 2015).

However, regardless of governments' efforts to encourage outward mobility, many students will not be able to study abroad, despite their preferences. To target this group of students, the mobility strategy (2012, p.5) requires governments "to develop other possibilities for mobility such as 'virtual mobility' [to] enable non-mobile students to have an 'international experience at home'". Similarly, this concept appears in later policy texts and is pushed forward by other actors that have access to the Bologna policy-making processes. A case in point is illustrated in the following excerpt from a position paper entitled "Bologna Digital", submitted to the BFUG and presented at the Paris ministerial conference of 2018.

> …only a fraction of each nation's students and staff take part in [mobility] programmes – and non-traditional students are least likely to be internationally mobile. Good internationalisation strategies [and additional] initiatives must be implemented to support 'internationalisation at home' for all students and staff in higher education. Digital technologies…can also help students to better prepare for their studies abroad and experience the academic culture at their host institution even before physically going there.
>
> (Kiron Open Higher Education, 2018 p.4)

"Internationalisation at home", which is achieved through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) or the establishment of International Branch Campuses (IBCs), enables HEIs to export their education services to the category of students who cannot afford to study abroad. While this strategy expands the education offer to the students from the losing countries, it puts increased pressure on their HEIs in facing international competition on their doorstep.

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, mechanisms of soft governance are set in place to guarantee that this policy agenda is followed through. To that end, ministerial *communiques* and other strategic documents define what is appropriate for a Bologna member and provide clear guidance for those who implement this agenda in the losing countries, helping them to socialise into it. At the same time, implementation is ensured through deadlines and indicators which are monitored through tools that are designed and used by the Bologna governing bodies, with some help from the European Commission (Papatsiba, 2006). These tools include implementation reports and scorecards, country reports and stocktaking,

implementation maps and student surveys, which make it easy to track progress and induce compliance through comparison and social learning (Ravinet, 2008).

> …the member countries will [report on] the progress towards achieving their mobility targets and on the removal of obstacles to mobility. Reports and further efforts will be made to improve the availability of **internationally comparable data** on the issue in order to promote **policy learning**.
>
> (Mobility for better learning, 2012, p.5, emphasis added)

Chart 4.1 (below) is an illustration of how these tools allow comparison in time and space, in order to track progress and identify governments that are lagging behind. For instance, it shows that by 2013 the winners on average had more obstacles to outward mobility (6 out of 7) than they do to inward mobility (4 out of 7), whereas the losers have on average more obstacles to inward mobility (5 out of 7). We can also see that the UK has major obstacles to outward mobility and that Estonia is a "model student" in having very few barriers to mobility.

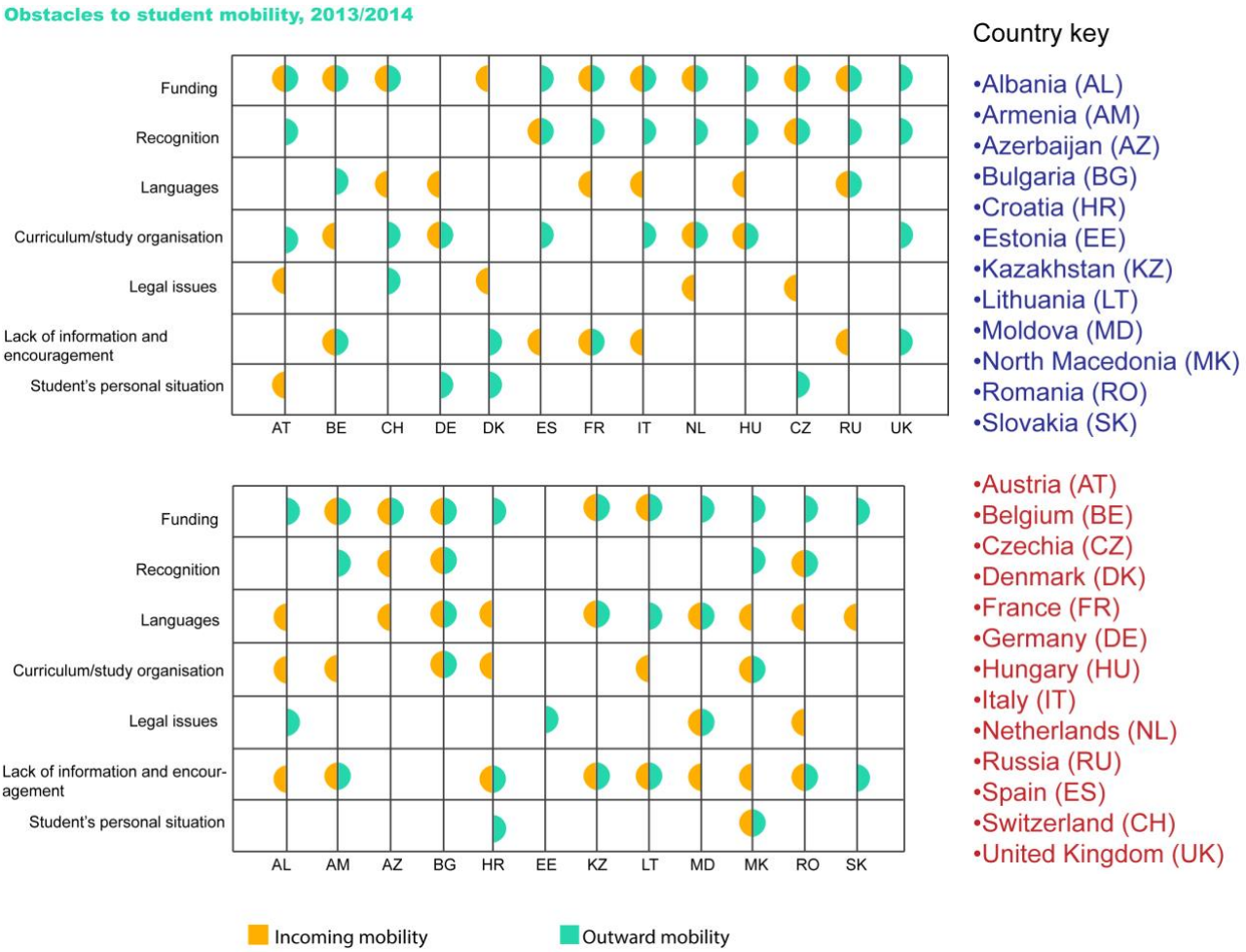


Figure 4.1: Obstacles to Student Mobility 2013-2014. The original table is presented in the Bologna implementation reports. It is redesigned to separate the results for the winners (up) and losers (down). **Source:** (EACEA, 2018)

Being part of the Europeanisation process (see chapter 2), Bologna has borrowed a page from the soft governance of the EU, as shown in earlier drafts of the paragraph quoted below:

> Progress on the removal of obstacles to mobility should also be included in the national reports. In this connection, we note with interest the initiative of the **European Commission for the introduction of a "mobility scoreboard" to** measure the removal of obstacles to mobility…
>
> (WG Mobility, Working Paper, 11th March 2011, p.13)

These soft governing tools, which resemble the Open Methods of Coordination (OMC), have been efficient in the European context, by steering policy congruence and helping to monitor policy implementation (Veiga & Amaral, 2012; Gornitzka, 2007). Similarly, empirical research by Ravinet (2008) has shown that they have been successful in the Bologna context, ensuring compliance by creating a sense of obligation among policy actors. However, joint efforts to implement this common agenda does not guarantee that it will work in the advantage of all members, as I show in the following section.

b. Common agenda, different interests

As explained in chapter 7, Bologna ministerial conferences are forums of socialisation where countries adopt joint commitments and decide the common agenda for higher education in Europe (EHEA, 2020b). These commitments also referred to as "action lines" are presented as representation of the common interest of all EHEA countries (Zgaga, 2012). However, as I discuss below, Bologna is mainly designed by the winners, mostly influenced by powerful transnational actors, and its overarching goals (e.g. higher mobility) do not seem to be in line with the losers' interests.

Firstly, empirical studies (Hoareau, 2012; Ravinet, 2005) have shown that when the education ministers of four developed countries (i.e. France, UK, Germany and Italy) got together to initiate what would later be the Bologna process, they were looking for ways to reform their national education systems, making them economically viable and internationally attractive, standing at the forefront of innovation and technology, and increasing their global influence. To that end, they came together to launch a joint initiative that would facilitate mobility and employability (Sorbonne communique, 1998). In other words, they were seeking ways to make it easier to attract international students and a highly skilled labour force. One year later, 28

ministers of education from other European countries gathered in Bologna to sign the Bologna declaration (1999), which in essence retained the same policy goals promoted in the Sorbonne declaration (Witte et al., 2008). Thus, by the time the losers joined Bologna, it was a policy agenda designed by four core EU countries, to respond to their national priorities, and represented their interests and preferences.

> So, it was a sort of [stops] let's say sort of a **private initiative of four countries** but when we went to Bologna all signed [up] to the idea of having the Bologna process, and they called it Bologna process. That is the history. That is the story. **Question**: *Were you thinking to change the European education or were you thinking to change your country's education system?*
>
> No, no, both. But starting from [my country] of course, because you cannot try to **export an idea from a country**, if you are not clever at home…
>
> (BP01, one of the founding ministers Bologna, interview on 28.10.2019)

Secondly, although the four ministers were already undertaking unrelated higher education reforms in their home countries, empirical evidence collected by Hoareau (2012) shows that they had reached similar answers to the same questions. Therefore, she argues that these ideas, which later were used to shape Bologna, had emerged in international forums where the ministers were already meeting and discussing these issues. Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that Bologna is in line with the global policy agenda on Education promoted by transnational actors such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU), which have been working for many years towards internationalisation of Higher Education and free movement of human capital (Corbett, 2011; Maassen & Musselin, 2009; Lingard & Ozga, 2007; Neave, 2002). Even the framing of the problem by the ministers seems to have been influenced by the economic paradigm presented in the OECD's (1996) paper "The Knowledge-Based Economy" (KBE), which discusses the purpose and the role of education, treating knowledge as a commodity and focuses on the role of universities in the economic growth and productivity of a country (Mundy et al., 2016; Jessop, Fairclough, & Wodak, 2008). Similarly, Bologna seems to be in line with the World Bank's discourse on how education should be delivered, stressing the efficiency of deregulated education systems, and the benefits of maximising competition (Lingard & Ozga, 2007).

> ***Question:*** *You said that Bologna was the solution, but what was the problem?*
>
> The problem was that [pauses to think]…studies were very different, the courses were very different…
>
> ***Question:*** *What problems did this diversity produce?*
>
> The consequence of this diversity, of this freedom of proceeding is that we have very different courses. And very different preparations of students that obtain a degree. And we don't build **up a real European labour market**. We had to make commissions for **moving from a country to another**, because labour market is another thing. Labour market is not built on the countries…
>
> (BP01, Minister of education, one of the four founders of Bologna)

Thirdly, although invited to join this cooperation as equal partners, at least in the first decade of Bologna, the losers were not given the same decision-making powers in the governing structures of Bologna, which were composed of the EU Troika countries and chaired by the host of the EU presidency (Corbett, 2011; Ravinet, 2008). Given the strong influence that the EU has had in setting Bologna's agenda (Moscovitz & Zahavi, 2019; Keeling, 2008; Papatsiba, 2006), being neither in the EU nor in the OECD, has placed the losers in an inferior position of power within the EHEA. However, it should be stated that formally every Bologna minister has always had equal power to vote or oppose joint commitments. Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter 7, even when the losers were given more formal powers within Bologna's governing structures, no significant change in behaviour was observed. The reasons for such behaviour are discussed in chapter 6, and they are related to the *common sense* among policy elite, who have accepted and internalised their role in the hierarchy (see chapter 2).

> ***Question****: Who came up with this idea [about the Bologna process]?*
>
> We were four ministers. [starts recalling names] Let's say, if I can say, **the great four**. We were the representatives of the great states of Europe.
>
> (BP01, Minister of education, one of the four founders of Bologna)

Fourthly, this common policy agenda, which promotes higher mobility, does not represent the interests of the losers. As discussed above, since in the economy of knowledge, human capital becomes central, the developed countries seek ways to lower barriers to mobility in order to attract human capital (Smith, 2002). Furthermore, when education becomes a commodity, developed countries seek for ways to export their education services (Altbach, 2004).

> Employment in the knowledge-based economy is characterised by increasing demand for more highly-skilled workers…. Changes in technology, and particularly the advent of information technologies, are making educated and skilled labour more valuable.
>
> (OECD, 1996, p.7)

However, developing countries lack the means to compete, and therefore mobility trends become one-directional, towards developed countries, resulting in a concentration of human capital in the winners (see Mahroum, 2005), and a *brain drain* in the losers. Moreover, since Bologna aims to standardise the *production process* and the *product* of education, some countries lose the competitive advantage that comes from distinctiveness. Similarly, lowering barriers to student mobility makes it easier for education providers to export their services and compete in previously national education markets. However, HEIs in the losing countries lack the resources to keep up with this international competition, and therefore they risk losing a higher percentage of their students, while not managing to attract more international students to their education system. A similar point is made by Lucas (1990) in explaining the vicious cycle whereby developing countries lose their human capital, when they most need it to develop. Thus, not only does this agenda represent the interests and preferences of the winners, but it also is detrimental to material interests of the losers.

Finally, while Bologna expects every member (including the losers) to follow the agenda of the winners, it shows no intention to tackle issues that are exclusive to the losers. Probably the best test of the welfare-promoting hypothesis is the issue of “balanced mobility”.

As discussed above, Bologna policy texts focus primarily on outward mobility, as it is stated in the following passage of the Bologna implementation report:

> Mobility is one of the core goals of the Bologna Process. The importance of removing obstacles to student and staff mobility has been underlined in a great number of political documents... **Outward mobility** of students is **the most supported kind of mobility**, and there are various ways in which it is supported.
>
> (BFUG, 2009, p.93, emphasis added)

However, as I show in the following section, the losers do not “suffer” from lower outward mobility. If anything, they have too much outward mobility and very low numbers of inbound students. To illustrate, in 2009 when the Louvain communique stipulated that in the following

decade every EHEA member should increase their outward mobility rate to 20%, Albania already had a 24.2% mobility rate, and less than 1% inward mobility (UIS, 2017).

Nevertheless, while there has been widespread agreement on the 20% outward mobility target, the attempt to set an inward mobility target, even as low as 5%, has met with stiff resistance from the winners, who already have high inward mobility rates, as revealed by the minutes of the meetings of the Working Group (WG) Mobility 2009 – 2012. To illustrate, the following passage from an earlier draft of the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA, was deleted from the final version published in the ministerial conference of Bucharest in 2012:

> [We agree] to encourage incoming student mobility, so that by 2020 **5 per cent** of all students matriculated in the EHEA have obtained their prior qualification elsewhere.
>
> (WG Mobility, Working paper, 30th June 2011, emphasis added)

Mobility targets are aspirational and setting them does not necessarily mean that they will be achieved within the agreed timeframe. However, they act as benchmarks to track progress, and considering the influence of the soft governing tools discussed in chapter 2, they influence the policy agenda and priorities of the governments. Furthermore, mobility targets change the way the direction of mobility (outward or inward) is perceived by policy actors, who are influenced by socialisation, comparison and policy learning processes (see chapter 6). Thus, setting an outward mobility target not only steers concerted efforts towards a certain direction, but it also defines outward mobility as a goal, rather than a problem. Nevertheless, focusing on outward mobility, while neglecting inward mobility, might lead to unbalanced mobility, and consequently to *brain drain*, as I show in the following section.

Evidence of an unbalanced mobility

In the discussion so far, I show that Bologna's policy agenda promotes higher levels of mobility. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that there is wide-spread agreement among students, academics and administrative staff in universities that the major impact of the Bologna process has been higher mobility (Neave & Veiga, 2012). Similarly, 79.6% of my

informants agreed (27.3%), or strongly agreed (52.3%) that Bologna process has made it easier for students of their country to study abroad.

However, in the introductory chapter, I also explained that student mobility trends are used as performance indicators for an education system. Thus, countries with a negative net balance are considered as *losers* and those with positive net balance as *winners*. In the following sections, I show evidence of unbalanced mobility among Bologna members and discuss the ways in which this policy agenda contributes to the emergence of winners and losers.

a. Winners and losers of mobility

Before Bologna, Europe was the second-largest sending area of international students in the world, with a third of all internationally mobile students, most of which were studying in the USA (OECD, 1997). In that context, the four ministers designed the Bologna process with the aim of making the European Higher Education attractive to international students and to the European students who were seeking an alternative abroad (Hoareau, 2012).

Within the first decade of Bologna, Europe became the most attractive study destination in the world, hosting 40% of all international students, with the US dipping to 18% (OECD, 2013). This was significant progress, considering that Europe hosts less than 20% of all HEIs in the World (UniRank, 2020). This trend continued in the second decade, with a 30% increase in inward mobility between 2011 and 2018 (EACEA, 2018). On the other hand, more than 86% of European mobile students remain within the EHEA (UIS, 2017).

However, the inflow of students is not equally distributed among all the EHEA members. As shown in Chart 4.2 (below), there are winners and losers of the competition for students. The winners have been able to attract a significantly higher percentage of mobile students both from outside and within the EHEA. To illustrate, 55% of 1.1 million of inward mobile students entering the EHEA, and a third of 869’701 European mobile students go to only three countries: the UK, France and Germany (EACEA, 2018).

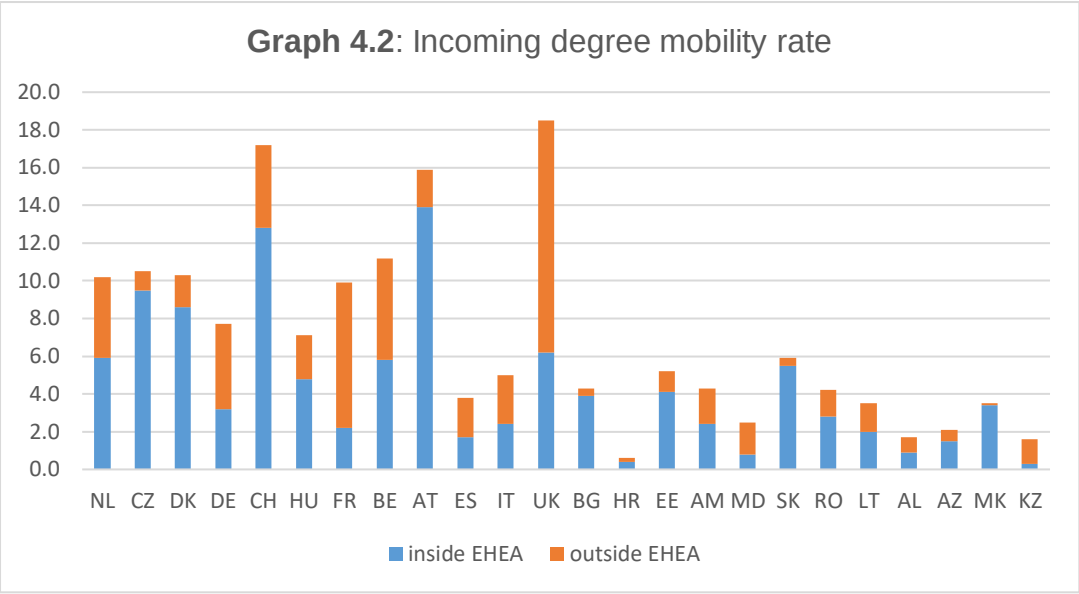


Chart 4.2: Incoming degree mobility rate - tertiary education mobility students from within/outside the EHEA studying in a country, as a percentage of the total number of students **Source**: EACEA, 2018

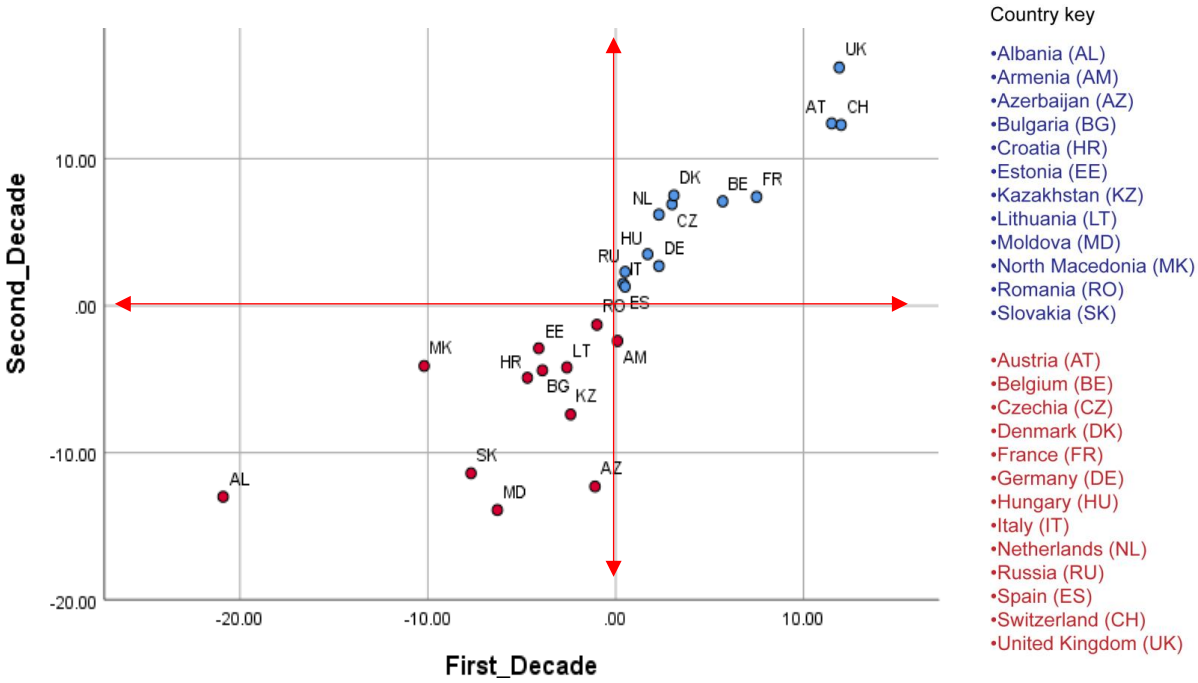


Chart 4.3 Winners and Losers. The average net balance of student mobility, for the first decade of Bologna (2000 to 2009) in the x-axis, and second decade (2010 to 2017) in y-axis **Source**: UIS, 2017

To put these numbers into perspective, the Chart 4.3 (above) compares countries on their average net balance mobility rate (that is: the number of mobile students as a percentage of all students) for both decades of Bologna. It can be seen that the net importing countries (the losers) are located on the bottom left side of the scatterplot, whereas the net exporting countries (the winners) are located on the top right side of it. In other words, regardless of their 20% outward mobility pledge, two decades after it, the winners are not sending more of their students abroad. Their average outward mobility rate was 2.8% in 1998 and remained at 2.9% in 2015, while the losers doubled it from 5.5% to 10.9% during the same time (UIS, 2016).

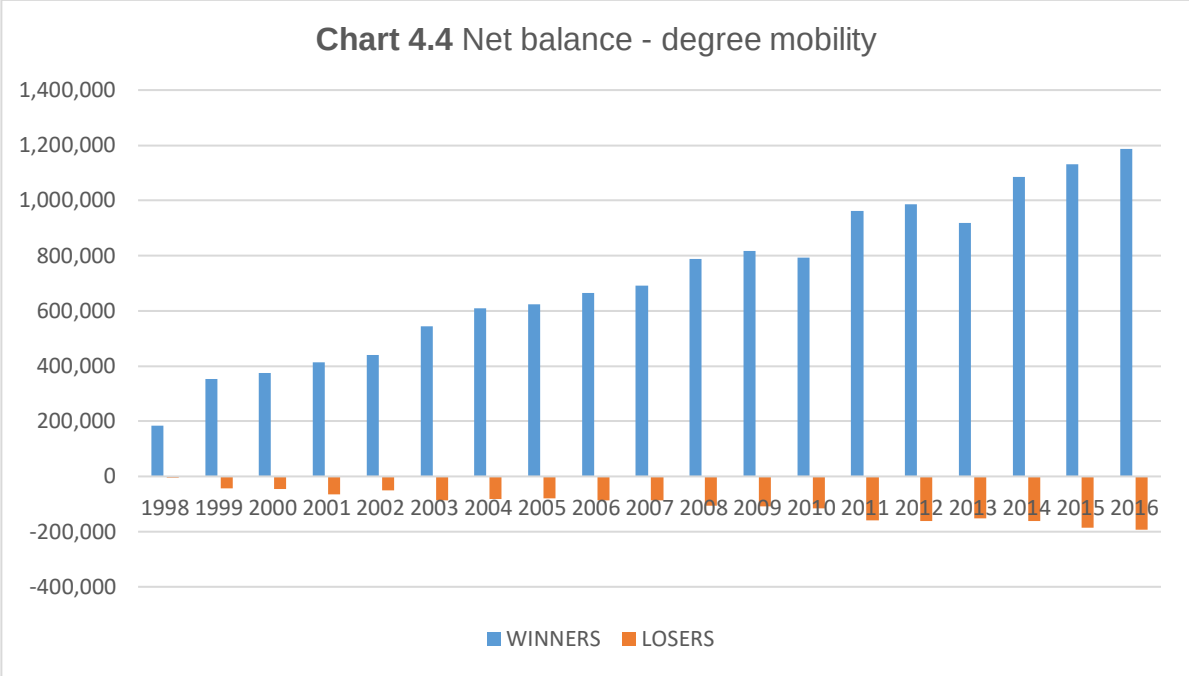


Chart 4.4 Net balance (inward minus outward mobile students) for degree mobility. **Source**: UIS, 2016

Moreover, Chart 4.4 (above) displays the total net balance of winners and losers in absolute values. Data show that while collectively the winners have improved their positive net balance by a sixfold, the losers went from a total annual balance of -4000 before Bologna (1998), to –200,000 in 2016. Hence, contrary to what neorealists would predict (see 'relative gains' argument in chapter 2), the losers are not only losing compared to the winners, but they are also losing compared to their own position before embarking on this mobility agenda.

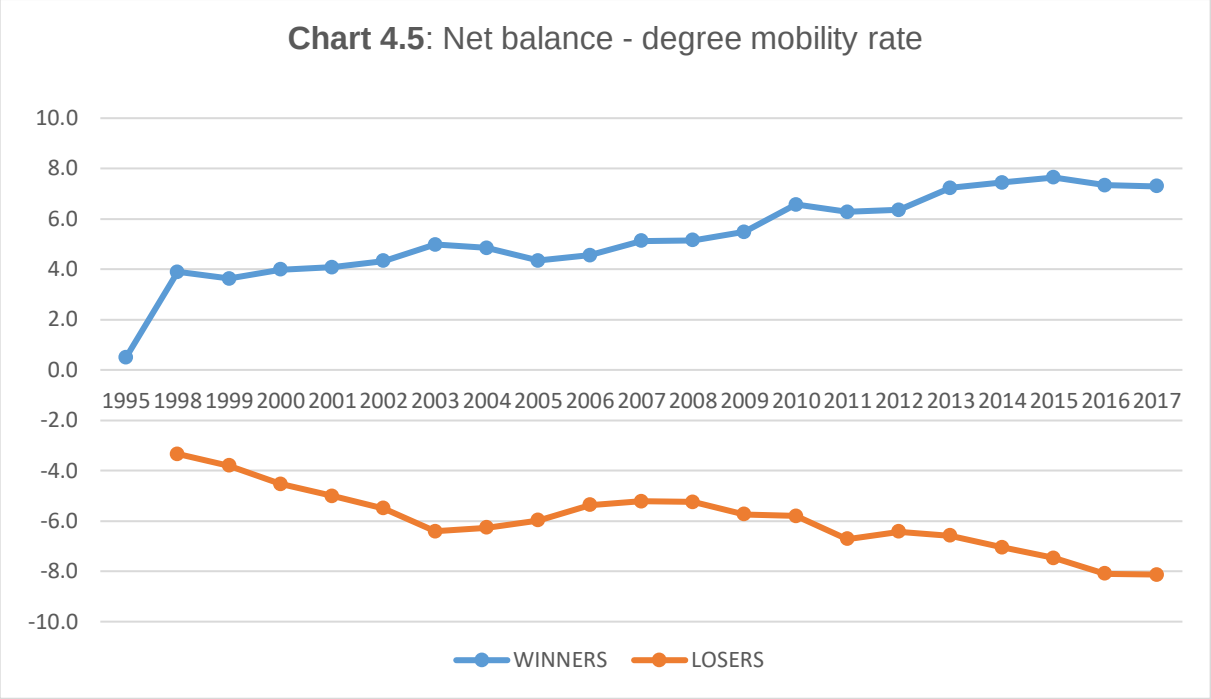


Chart 4.5 Mobility balance rate. The rate of inward mobility minus the rate of outward mobility. **Source**: UIS, 2017

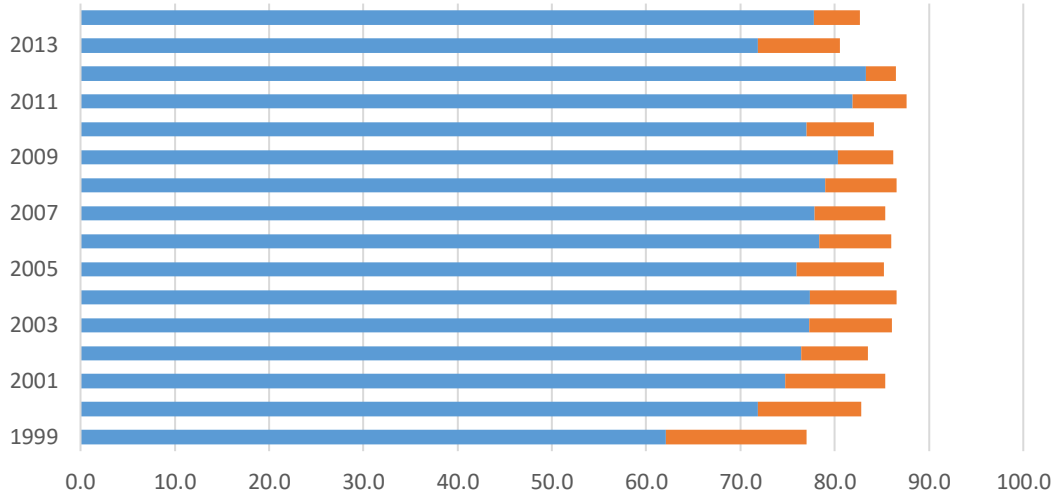
To control for the impact of the student population size, or changes in demographics, Chart 4.5 (above) compares mobility rates, that is the number of mobile students (inbound and outbound) as a percentage of all of the country's tertiary education students. Using statistics published in the first issue of the "Education at a Glance" (OECD, 1997), we can see that in 1995, the winners had a net balance of 0.4 %, with two of the founders of Bologna, Italy and France, having a negative balance of -1.4 and -0.1 respectively, which means that they had more domestic students abroad that they had inbound mobile students. However, available data from UNESCO's Institute of Statistics (UIS) displayed in this Chart show that they managed to improve their mobility rates significantly, indicating that they are becoming progressively more attractive. On the other hand, the losers have had an incremental negative net balance, indicating a worsening attractiveness of their education systems:

> The incoming mobility rate may be considered as an indicator of the country's attractiveness…[whereas] The outward mobility rate may… be an indicator of possible insufficiencies in the education system of the country of origin.
>
> (EACEA, 2018, p.252)

b. One-directional flow

As discussed above, more European mobile students are staying within EHEA today than they did before Bologna, and this rate is even higher for the students from the losers. Thus, the number of outward mobile students from the losing countries choosing to study in another EHEA country rose with 10%, reaching 93% in 2014 (UIS, 2016). However, when country destinations are taken into account, a clear pattern of one-directional-flow emerges. In 2014 only 4.7% of outward mobile students from the losing countries went to another loser. Similarly, Chart 4.6 (below) reveals that the percentage of European students studying in the losing countries has dipped by a third between 1999 and 2013 (*ibid*).

Chart 4.6: Where do students of the losing countries go (%)?



	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
to the winners	62.1	71.9	74.8	76.5	77.3	77.4	76.0	78.3	77.9	79.0	80.4	77.0	81.9	83.3	71.9	77.8
to the losers	14.9	10.9	10.6	7.0	8.8	9.2	9.3	7.7	7.5	7.6	5.9	7.2	5.7	3.2	8.7	4.9

Chart 4.6 European students study destination. The number of EHEA students studying in the winners/losers, as a percentage of all EHEA mobile students studying within EHEA. **Source: UIS, 2016**

Similarly, table nr. 4.1 (below) displays top destination countries for mobile students, and the results are striking. Virtually all top destination countries are among the winners, indicating a low preference of students, from winners and losers alike, to study in one of the losing countries. This pattern of one-directional flow of students may reveal why higher mobility might lead to even more imbalanced mobility, the impact of which is discussed below.

Table 4.1: Top study EHEA destinations in 2015

Country of **destination** (host country)	Country of **origin** (sending country)																										
	AT	BE	CZ	DK	FR	DE	HU	IT	NL	UK	CH	ES	RU	AL	LT	AM	AZ	KZ	BG	RO	EE	MD	SK	MK	HR
AT			3	3		1	1	1			3								2				3		
BE					1				1																
CZ													2				2	1					1		
DK	3	3				3	3			3		3			1						1				
FR	2	1	2	2		2		2	3	1	2	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	2	3	2			
DE	1	2	1	1	2		2	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	2	3		3	3
HU																							2		
IT					3									1		3				1		1		1	1
BG																								2	

Table nr.4.1 Top three-country destinations for study. The vertical column shows the country of origin, whereas the horizontal row shows top destination countries. **Source**: UIS, 2016.

Country key: Albania (AL), Armenia (AM), Azerbaijan (AZ), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Estonia (EE), Kazakhstan (KZ), Lithuania (LT), Moldova (MD), North Macedonia (MK), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK); Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Netherlands (NL), Russia (RU), Spain (ES), Switzerland (CH), United Kingdom (UK).

The impact of imbalanced mobility

Twenty years after joining Bologna, some members have managed to increase their *positive* net balance of student mobility, whereas others developed an even worse *negative* one. Based on the common goal to increase inward mobility, as the indicator of attractiveness of an education system, the former countries are considered as the *winners* of this competition, and the latter as the *losers*. However, these labels have only been used so far in this text in regard to the mobility numbers. In the following section, I discuss the implications of mobility flows, showing that a negative net balance has social, economic and political implications.

a. The social impact

The body of literature on migration has talked about the “brain-drain” phenomenon, which refers to the transfer of human capital from developing countries towards more developed ones (Beine et al., 2003; Grubel & Scott, 1966). Empirical studies have shown that “brain drain” has a negative impact on the economy and welfare of the sending countries

(Nedeljkovic, 2014; Maria & Lazarova, 2012; Bhagwati & Hamada, 1974), and that is particularly concerning for small developing countries (Collier, 2013; Commander et al., 2004). However, other authors view "brain drain" as an outdated concept and argue that instead, we should talk about "brain-circulation", for we live in a world of temporary movement of skilled labour, where knowledge is shared rather than transferred permanently (Daugeliene & Marcinkeviciene, 2009; Daugeliene, 2007; Tung, 2008; Blitz, 2005; Saxenian, 2002). Some authors have suggested that brain drain has positive effects for sending countries because it raises investment in human capital (Mayr et al., 2009; Commander et al., 2004; Stark et al., 1997). In line with this argument, it is often argued in the Bologna policy texts that higher mobility (including degree mobility) gives to students and academics an opportunity to circulate knowledge, which helps countries to improve the quality of tertiary education; and boost research and innovation (EACEA, 2018; EHEA, 2012).

However, as I discuss below, greater levels of mobility have the potential to increase brain drain, and consequently concentrate human capital and knowledge, which hampers the losers' efforts to improve the quality of their education systems and boost research and innovation.

a.1 Concentration of talent

In a highly cited World Bank publication, Salmi (2009) discusses what makes world-class universities successful, attributing their success to three components: (i) concentration of talent (students and faculty) (ii) financial resources (iii) favourable governing features. Hence, the aspiration of countries to improve the quality of their tertiary education system, and improve their global reputation should start with their efforts to attract and retain talented students and academics, or as the British PM would call them "the brightest and the best":

> It is right that we should attract the brightest and the best to Britain… We want the brightest and best to come here…We are working with the sector to encourage the brightest and best students from around the world to come and study here.
> (Britain's then Prime Minister, Cameron, 2011, October 10)

However, while all countries strive to become attractive to students, evidence suggests that only the winners have been successful in it. For instance, the index of attractivity produced by

Study.eu (2018), confirms that almost all of the winners, and none of the losers, are among the top 15 attractive study destinations in Europe. Thus, being able to attract more students has allowed the winners to widen their talent pool and select the best candidates (Commander et al., 2004). Chart 4.7. (below) offers a good illustration of how the UK universities have been able to increase their entry requirements (UCAS tariffs), and consequently attract more high-performing students (Baker, 2017, August 7). To grasp the impact of international students in this trend, it helps to know that the Russell Group, which is composed of globally renowned elite universities, although accounting for less than 15% of all British HEIs, attracts almost half (46%) of all inward mobile students in the UK (Russell Group, 2020).

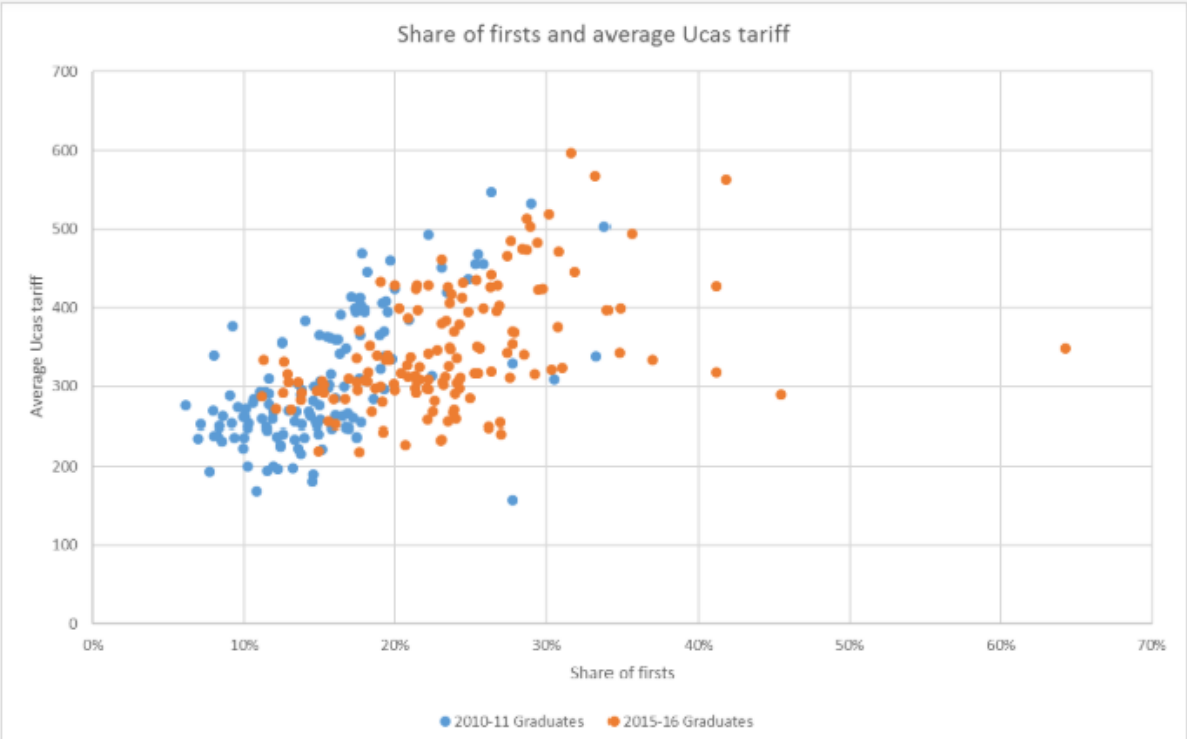


Chart 4.7 Students attainments in UK universities. The percentage of firsts received by undergraduates (x-axis), and the average UCAS tariff of university candidates (y-axis). Data compared between the academic year 2010 and 2015 **Source**: Hesa. Analysis by Press Association and THE

However, while one in two mobile students in the UK may be able to secure a place at a highly selective university, the majority of the mobile students in Europe must go through a screening process. For instance, they must acquire a foreign language[7] and achieve high academic

[7] Only 27.3% of inward mobile students in Europe come from home countries with the same official language as the host country (OECD, 2012)

attainments to be offered a university place, and (sometimes) be awarded a scholarship or research grant. Furthermore, they should have the ambition to travel to another country, where they need to adjust to a new society and culture, in order to advance their academic and professional careers. Consequently, it is very likely that the net importing countries, with very competitive HEIs, manage to attract not only more students but the "best and the brightest". However, in the case of degree mobility students have to choose between HEIs at home and those abroad, and therefore this competition takes the form of a zero-sum game, which means that the gains of one country are the losses of another. In other words, the success of the winners in attracting bright students is often achieved at the expense of the losers.

Proponents of "brain circulation" argue that even when the best students study abroad, upon return, they will bring new knowledge and skills (Daugeliene, 2007). Nevertheless, contrary to such theoretical expectations, the concentration of outstanding students is followed by a concentration of talented academics, for reasons as much related to individual choices, as to the situation in both countries (i.e. the sending and the host country).

Firstly, there is a very low desire among mobile students of the losing countries to return upon completing their studies. Research shows that most of them go to study abroad with the primary intention of ensuring permanent migration to the host country, or another developed one (Teichler, 2012). Survey after survey confirm international students' intention to stay and work in the host country upon graduation. These figures are as high as 83% for inward mobile students residing in the US (Han, Stocking, Gebbie, & Appelbaum, 2015), and up to 79.8% for mobile students in Europe (SVR, 2012). Moreover, compared to other parts of Europe, students from Eastern Europe are even more likely to stay in the host country, as is evidenced in a National Science Foundation survey discussed in Saxenian (2001).

> The destinations of international students also highlight the attractiveness of specific education systems, whether because of their academic reputation or because of subsequent immigration opportunities.
>
> (OECD, 2011, p.328)

This low desire to return might be influenced by the socio-economic and political context in the sending country. Bratsberg (1995) has found that the economic and political situation in

the sending country is a good predictor of the desire to return upon graduation, such that students from developing countries have a lower desire than those from developed ones. Moreover, empirical studies (Nedeljkovic, 2014; Borjas, 1992), have found that the return of graduates will depend on the extent to which their skills are valued in their home country so that if they are less valued than in the host country, the most skilled among them will not return.

Following these arguments, one might argue that a lower return rate to the losers should be expected, because most these countries are less developed, and they are tainted by high levels of corruption that hinders their capacity to value skills and knowledge (see chapters 5 and 6). Empirical studies (Dustmann, 1996; Knerr 1994) have found that corruption, nepotism and lack of meritocracy in recruitment make the labour markets in most of the losing countries unwelcoming for qualified candidates. As Marimon, Lietaert, & Grigolo (2009, p.32) argue, in these countries "jobs are still very much won by 'spotted' candidates who have the support of 'somebody', instead of being assessed on the basis of their performance".

Hence, even if the losers take technical steps to improve their net mobility balance, it is unlikely that they will attract back their graduates if the existing structural problems persist (Mahroum, 2005). Consequently, their high outward student mobility is likely to lead to long-term brain-drain. For example, Ionescu (2015) has found that the majority of Romanian emigrants (i.e. a losing country) residing in western Europe are former students that decided to stay in the host country after completing their studies.

On the other hand, the net importing countries of Bologna have been very active in providing a path of long-term migration to their inwardly mobile students (OECD & UNDESA, 2013). Thus, they have shown a preference for attracting graduate students as a strategy to recruit a highly skilled labour force (OECD, 2011). For example, most of the winners have introduced visas that give to postgraduates time to find a job (De Wit & Ripmeester, 2013, February 16).

> In general, [EU] the Member States are increasingly interested in incorporating former international students into their labour markets, and have changed their national immigration laws to incentivise their stay (e.g. lowered salary requirements and a permit to stay for the purpose of job searching or starting a business).
>
> (EU, 2018, p.1)

As discussed in section 2.a), all Bologna members are encouraged to ease their immigration policies, in a bid to improve their attractiveness to human capital, but these policies have been successful only for the winners, who have managed to attract human capital according to their domestic needs (OECD, 2011; Beine et al., 2003; Bratsberg, 1995). Moreover, they are becoming very selective in their immigration policies, seeking to retain only “the best and the brightest” (Lucas, 2005; Teferra, 2005; Faini, 2003; Cervantes & Guellec, 2002).

Subsequently, the combination of low desire to return among graduates, and selective policies in the host country, increase the chances of brain drain for the losers. In an empirical study, Knerr (1994) found that highly skilled migrants spend longer time abroad, as compared to unskilled migrants. Similarly, other authors (Commander et al., 2004; Dullep, 1994; Borjas, 1989) argue that a large share of returning migrants belongs to the least skilled who failed to integrate into the highly competitive labour market of the host countries. In other words, human capital concentrates where it is already in abundance (Easterly & Levine, 2001).

A case in point of this argument is the distribution of Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) fellowships, which is one of the most competitive EU fellowships established to support talented researchers and promote the internationalisation of European Higher Education and Research (Euraxess, 2018, February 12). In the last three decades, it has financially supported 140,000 researchers at every stage of their career, including 40,000 doctoral candidates (EC, 2019, August). MSCA Fellows are free to choose the country and the institution where they will develop their project. However, the losing countries are less attractive, and therefore researchers from the winning and the losing countries alike, do not prefer them as a basis to develop their projects.

Thus, although MSCA has supported fellowships from 160 nationalities, hosted by institutions in 100 countries, Charts 4.8 (below) show that 54% of the researchers from of the winning countries, and 47% from the losers, choose to go in one of the winners (EC, 2019, August). Similarly, country factsheets show that between 2007 and 2014, more than 80% of fellowships were developed in the winning countries. From the losers' side, only eight Moldovan researchers developed their projects in Moldova, Slovakia and Romania (EC, 2016).

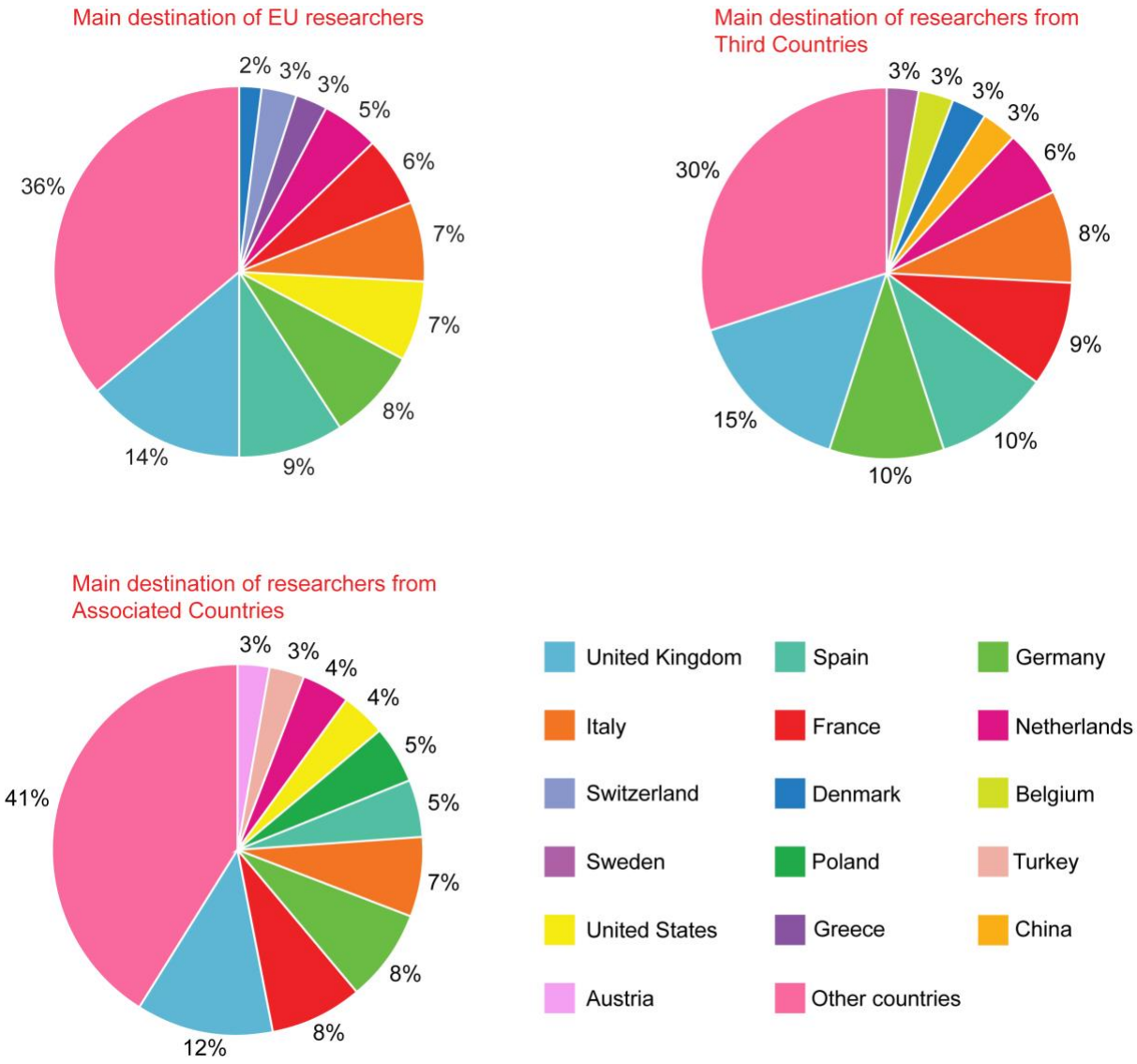


Chart 4.8 Country destinations of MSCA scholars, divided between EU, Associated Countries (i.e. most of the losers) and Third countries (other non-EU) **Source**: EC, 2019, August

In sum, higher student mobility may lead to brain drain, because most of the outward mobile students do not return upon graduation, for reasons that are as much personal as they are related to the country of origin. At the same time, net importing countries are applying selective migration policies that allow them to attract and concentrate the human capital, which gives them a head start in the concentration of knowledge, as I discuss in the following section.

a.2 concentration of knowledge

In the new economic paradigm, knowledge turns into an economic resource (Drucker, 1993), whereas research takes a central role in the generation of knowledge, driving innovation and fostering the development of states and societies (Lingard & Ozga, 2007; Crossley & Holmes, 2001). However, high levels of emigration among highly educated citizens drain net exporting countries of the very people that they need in order to innovate (Collier, 2013). Thus, the loss of human capital hinders the losers' efforts because it deprives them of the necessary human and financial resources.

> In new growth theory, knowledge can raise the returns on investment, which can, in turn, contribute to the accumulation of knowledge...
>
> (OECD, 1996 p.11)

As I show below, the increase in outward mobility in the losing countries has been followed by a decline in the overall number of students. This has implications for the admission standards applied by their HEIs, and consequently for their reputation. In a statistical study, Monks and Ehrenberg (1999), found that the lower the demand for a university, the lower its entry requirements are, creating a vicious cycle where university's reputation is harmed, which in turn, brings fewer students. Accordingly, the evidence presented in the following chapters shows that many HEIs in the losing countries have lowered their university entry requirements in response to the fall in tertiary education enrolments.

On the other hand, graduate students often contribute to the Research and Development programs of affiliated universities, as well as the Innovation and Technology of a country (Seddon et al., 2006). Consequently, as Altbach (2004) argues, international students, graduate students, in particular, contribute to the improvement of the host country's competitiveness. Thus, losing high proportions of their students has the potential to harm the quality and the reputation of HEIs in the losing countries. Indeed, league tables show that over the past twenty years HEIs in the losers have not managed to improve the quality or the reputation of their education systems. The only global league table that ranks countries based on the strength of their education system, produced by the British company Quacquarelli Symonds, is dominated by the winners, while the losers have not been able to improve their

position over the years (see QS rankings in Table.4.2 below). University league tables too are dominated by the winners, while two decades have not been sufficient time for the losers' HEIs to appear in the top 300 (see Table 4.3 below for THE and Shanghai rankings).

Table 4.2 QS Higher Education System Strength Ranking

	2016				2018			
	Top 5	Top 10	Top 30	Top 50	Top 5	Top 10	Top 30	Top 50
Winners	2	4	11	12	2	4	11	12
Losers	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
European countries	2	4	14	21/50	2	4	15	22/50

Source: QS, 2016; QS, 2018; QS, 2019

Table 4.3 Number of countries with HEIs ranked at top 300 universities in the Times Higher Education (THE) Ranking, and/or Academic Ranking of World Universities (*alas* Shanghai Ranking)

Year	**2003**	**2011**		**2015**		**2019**	
Ranking	**ARWU**	**ARWU**	**THE**	**ARWU**	**THE**	**ARWU**	**THE**
Winners	12	12	9	12	11	12	11
Losers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: THE, 2020b

Although the accuracy of these rankings is sometimes disputed (Boulton, 2010), they do employ a solid methodology, and use very rich datasets of indicators, to assess the quality of teaching and research, as well as the performance of students and alumni (THE, 2020b; ARWU, 2020). Moreover, these rankings use periodic cross-national surveys to assess (as well as to contribute to) the reputation of HEIs, which, as Musselin (2018) argues, is often used as a proxy for quality. On the other hand, Podolny (1993) argues that since consumers have to make the transaction before they perceive the quality, reputation is used as a sign of quality, and it can be influenced by a force of inertia, which creates a vicious cycle. For instance, Monks and Ehrenberg (1999) have found a positive correlation between university ranking and their ability to attract donations. In other words, attracting outstanding students helps universities improve their performance and reputation, which in turn helps them attract talented students and academics and accumulate financial capital (see THE, 2020a; Linney,

2020, January 9). Vice versa, losing the best students, harms the reputation and the quality of universities, making this cycle hard to break.

Secondly, losing a higher percentage of students drives significant financial resources away from the education sector of the losers. As discussed in the following chapter, in most of the losing countries, public subsidies to HEIs are tied to student numbers, whereas private universities rely heavily on tuition fees. Consequently, outwardly mobile students remove access to significant sums of money that could have been invested in home HEIs. To illustrate, in 2011 alone, Albanian outbound students spent roughly 300 million Euros to cover their education costs in other EHEA countries (see Appendix 4.1). To put that into perspective, in the same year, the budget for public universities in Albania was six-time smaller at 52 million Euros (Arsimi.gov, 2020). At the same time, the losing governments have not managed to substitute this financial loss through public subsidies. Indeed, from 2000 to 2015, the average spending on education in the losing countries fell from 3.7% to 3.6% of their GDP (UIS, 2016). Nevertheless, rather than an end in itself, money is a means that enables institutions and countries to purchase the necessary knowledge and human capital. For instance, Salmi's (2009) "recipe" for academic excellence mentioned above, requires that universities have an abundance of funds to support research. Similarly, Henning (2017, July 19) has used rich panel data to find a strong positive correlation between the financial resources of HEIs, and their position in league tables. However, the losers suffer from scare funds for higher education and research. In the last two decades, their average Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) has been 0.7% of their GDP, which is significantly less, in relative and absolute terms, than what the winners spend (Eurostat, 2017; WIPO, 2011).

Thus, the financial capital that outbound students take with them abroad deprives the HEIs in the losing countries of valuable financial capital that could otherwise allow them to afford competitive salaries to attract and retain talented academics (see Baty, 2017, August 7). To illustrate, researchers in the losing countries are paid, four times less than their colleagues in the winning countries, respectively 11,000 EUR and 45,000 EUR (Salmi, 2009; EC, 2007).

Chart 4.9 (below) compares research careers in the winners (blue) and losers (red), showing that not only salaries are lower in the losing countries, but also the salary progression is very small over the years, making the research career less attractive in these countries. As a corollary, the losers have on average half as many researchers per one million people, as the winners, respectively 2,150 and 4,700 (WIPO, 2011).

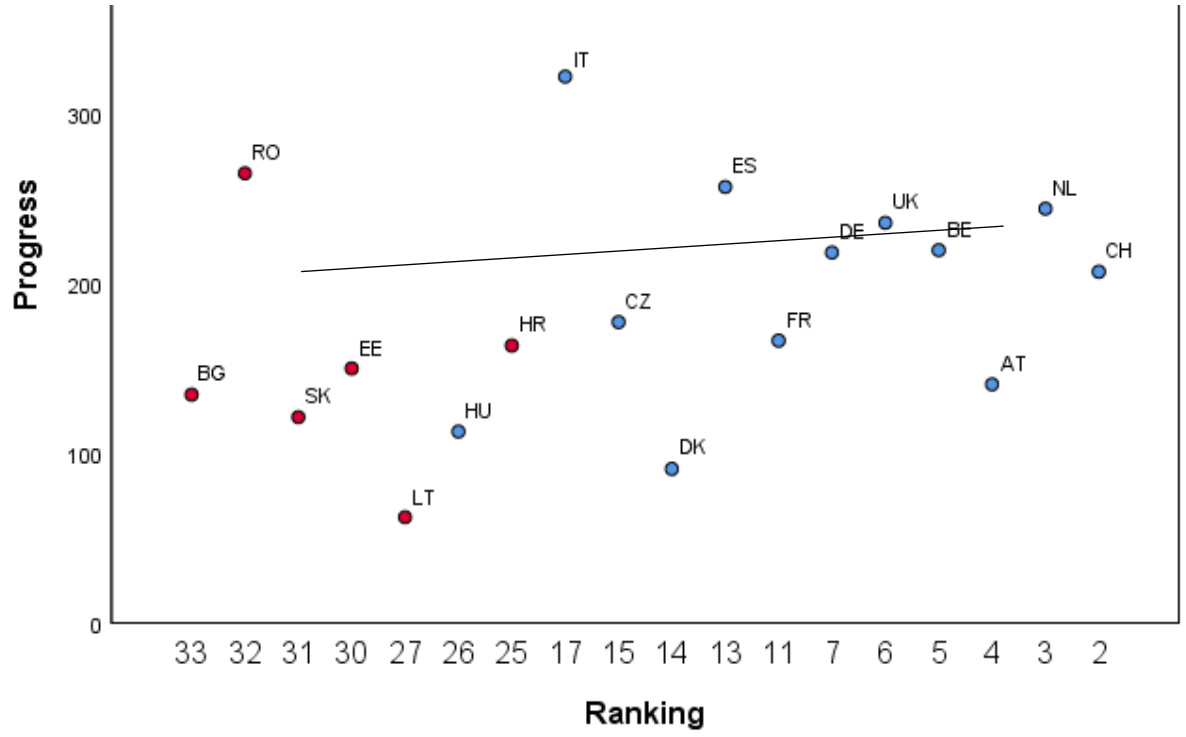


Chart 4.9 Progression of salaries in the research career in each country. The X-axis shows the country's ranking on researchers remuneration. The Y-axis shows the progress of salaries over the career **Source**: EC, 2007

Country key: Albania (AL), Armenia (AM), Azerbaijan (AZ), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Estonia (EE), Kazakhstan (KZ), Lithuania (LT), Moldova (MD), North Macedonia (MK), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK); Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Netherlands (NL), Russia (RU), Spain (ES), Switzerland (CH), United Kingdom (UK).

Another potential source of income is research grants. Here too, the limited capacity to attract and retain researchers has made the losers disadvantaged in the European competition for research grants. For example, Chart 4.10 (below) shows that between 2007 and 2019 the losers received only 13 research grants from the European Research Council (ERC), which accounts for 0.28% of all issued grants, whereas 82.9% went to the winners (ERC, 2020).

Similarly, the MSCA fund, discussed above, has disproportionately funded researchers from the winning countries, who have received 70% of the budget for EU members, and 50% of the budget allocated to non-EU countries (EC, 2019, August).

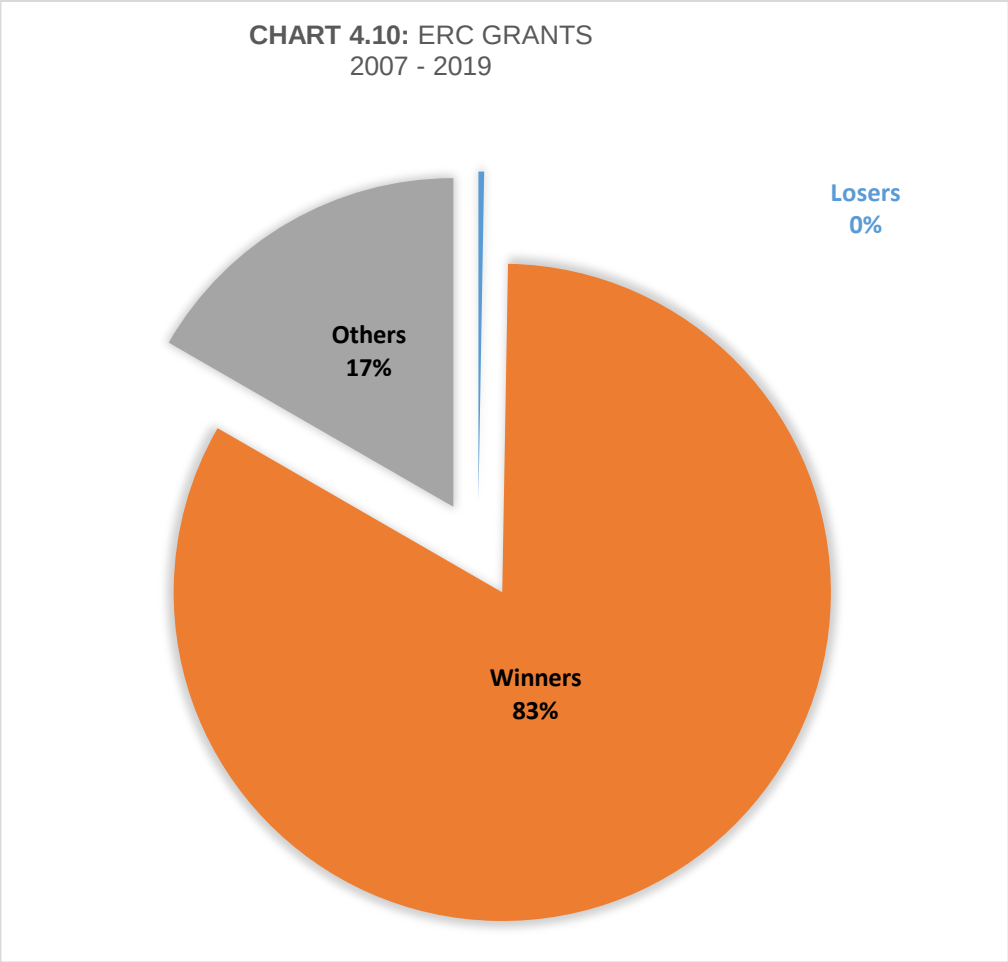


Chart 4.10 ERC grants issued between 2007- 2009 Source: ERC, 2020

On the other hand, research grants like those issued by the ERC are often considered as an indicator of the quality of research (Musselin, 2018b), leading to a vicious cycle between the quality of research and the availability of funds:

> As one would expect, salaries in countries with the highest numbers of institutions on the world rankings of tertiary education are the highest, while countries with little or no global tertiary education presence have the lowest salaries. It must not be mistaken as a coincidence that the best-quality research appears to be coming out of the best-paid researcher pools. In academia, the adage “you get what you pay for” appears accurate regarding better-quality work being done where salaries are relatively highest.
>
> (Salmi, 2009, p.26)

As a corollary of the lack of human and financial resources, the losers have not been able to improve research and harness innovation. In the Global Innovation Index, produced by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), all but one of the losers, rank very low in the global ranking, and they are ranked even lower in recent years than they did previously (WIPO, 2019; 2016). Moreover, they score 23 out of 100 on the component of Research and Development, and again their scores are lower in recent years (WIPO, 2019; 2011b). Consequently, the losers' research output has been insignificant, considering only 0.2% of Intellectual Property (IP) patents have been issued to all the losers together, while Germany alone (a winners) accounts for 16 times more IPs issued in the same year (WIPO, 2015).

In summary, the empirical reality observed in the case of the Bologna's losers does not comply with the theoretical propositions that higher mobility increases circulation of people and knowledge, improves the quality of education and research, and fosters innovation. The consequences have been quite the opposite for the losers, who have been deprived of talented students and academics, who have lost significant financial resources, harming their competitiveness for students and funds, damaged the reputation of their HEIs and hindered their efforts to improve the quality and the output of research.

b. The economic impact

The first economic argument in favour of higher degree mobility is that it helps countries expand their education market, export education services and bring substantial revenues to their economies (OECD, 2016; Altbach and Knight, 2007; Knight, 2008; Straubhaar, 2000).

> Countries that charge their international students the full cost of education reap significant trade benefits… [and therefore most of them] have actually made international education an explicit part of their socio-economic development strategy and have initiated policies to attract international students on a revenue-generating or at least a cost-recovery basis.
>
> (OECD, 2011, p.324)

These propositions have been proven right for many of the Bologna winners. In 2019 StudyPortals estimated that international students have contributed, directly and indirectly, $300 billion to the developed countries. An example is the UK, where in 2014 alone international students generated £25.8 billion in gross output for the economy of the country

(Universities UK, 2017). A detailed report (Kelly et al., 2014) about the impact of the Higher Education sector in the UK economy makes the following points:

- Through both direct and secondary or multiplier effects, the higher education sector generated over £73.11 billion of output and 757,268 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs throughout the economy.
- The higher education sector as a whole generated £10.71 billion by exporting services as follows:
    - £3.24 billion from fees paid by overseas students and £390 million by EU students
    - £920 million on research and £370 million on consultancy from international sources
    - £740 million on residence and catering
    - £4.91 billion off-campus on expenditure from non-UK students and £140 million from non-UK visitors

However, the situation is quite different in the other side, that of the losers, where predictions both on demand and supply have not complied with the empirical reality, as I discuss below.

b.1 demand and supply

From the supply side, Bologna reforms have encouraged the introduction of legislation that has allowed the emergence of private universities in most of the losers. All over Europe, the first decade of the 2000s saw the establishment of hundreds of new Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (ETER, 2020), some of which were International Campus Branches (ICB) established by universities from the winning countries, who saw potential in exporting their services (C-BERT, 2017). At the same time a dozen private HEIs and ICBs were established in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia and Kazakhstan (C-BERT, 2017), which caused an immediate expansion of the education offer in these countries.

However, there are doubts about the quality of these institutions. For instance, only 0.8% of all private HEIs in Europe appear in league tables, although they account for more than 20% of all HEIs (Unirank, 2020). Similarly, there are concerns that IBCs provide an inferior quality of studies to those of home institutions (Bothwell, 2019, June 20; Altbach, 2010). In addition, these institutions are not very sustainable (Altbach, 2010; Larsen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2002). For instance, more than 14 IBCs closed in recent years (C-BERT, 2017), and many others face substantial difficulties that raise doubts about their long-term future (Bothwell, 2019, June

20; Lane, 2011). Consequently, the lack of reliability and sustainability of these institutions, make them less appealing to international students, who, after all, can easily travel to their home institutions instead. Thus, although more institutions emerged in the losers, they did not contribute to a substantial expansion of the education offer, which could have brought more international students to these countries and made them internationally competitive.

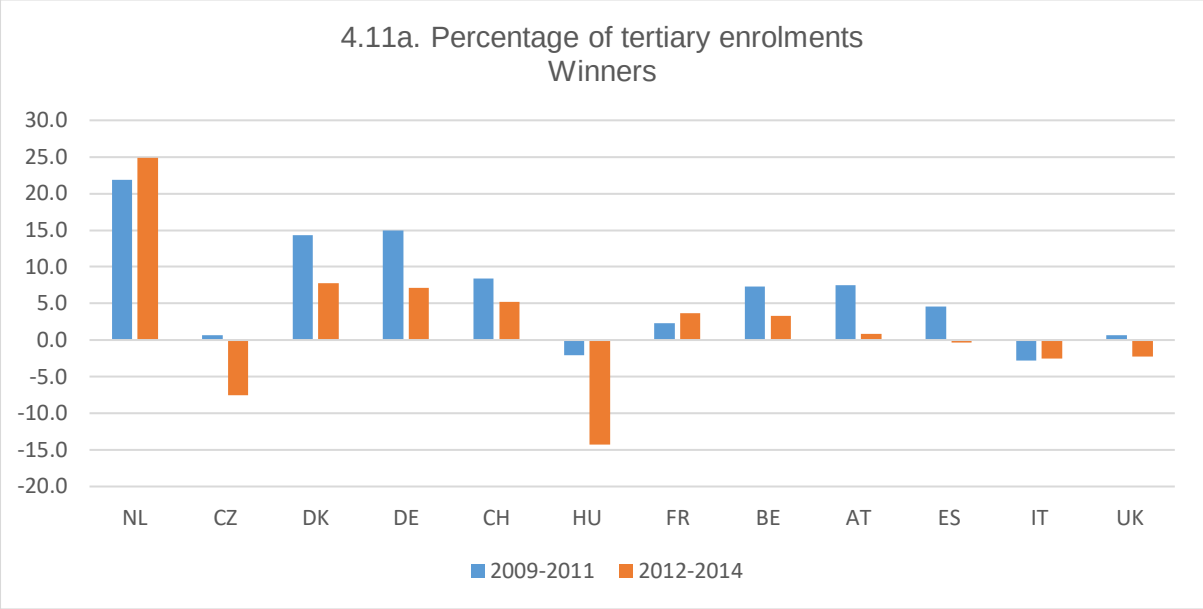
However, while their capacity to attract international students is limited, they often compete in the local markets for domestic students and staff, bringing international competition to the doorstep of national HEIs and making it even harder for them to succeed. To illustrate, in the first decade of Bologna, while inward mobility increased on average by 0.3% (from 1.8 to 2.1) in the losing countries, the share of domestic students attending private HEIs increased thirty times more (9.6%) going from 17.1% to 26.7% (UN statistics, 2020).

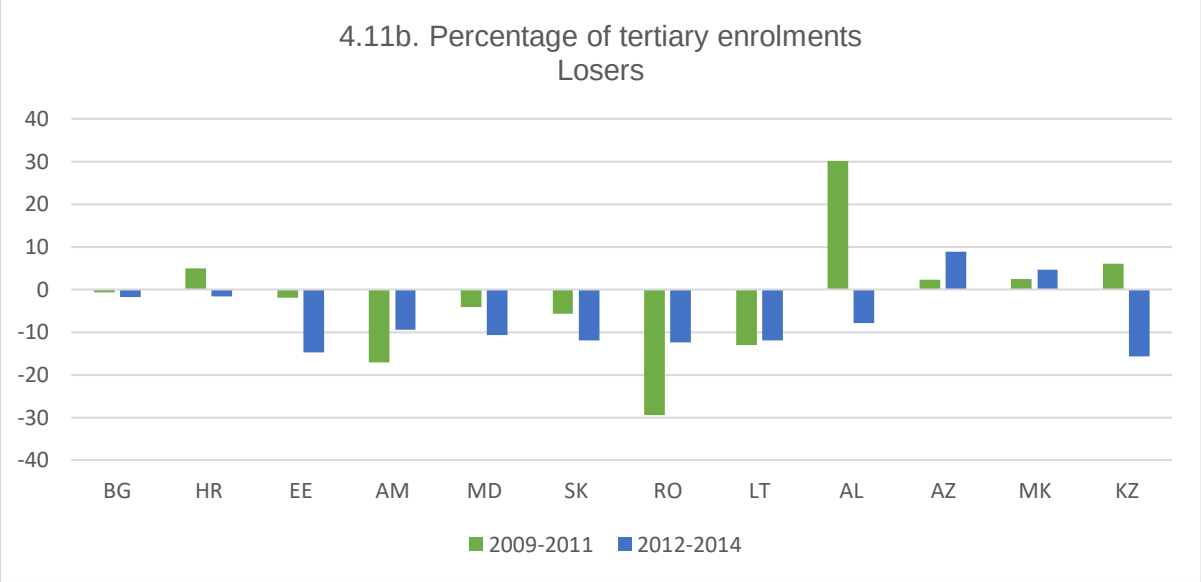
Consequently, this tougher competition for a decreasing student population forced many institutions to close study programs, to merge with other universities, or to close their doors (see chapter 5). Thus, between 2006 and 2014, the losers lost 50 thousand academics, which accounts for 26 % of all their academic staff (UN statistics, 2020). The impact of the decline in the number of students on the numbers of academic staff is most visible in Romania, where a 45.8% decline in the number of tertiary education enrolment corresponds with a 13.4% decrease in the number of academics (EACEA, 2018).

Some authors discussed above argue that higher emigration rates among highly educated migrants will increase the demand for tertiary education in the sending country. They argue that education increases employability, and emigration will increase the investment return on education. Consequently, the prospect of emigration increases the incentive to pursue higher education (Mayr et al., 2009; Commander et al., 2004; Stark et al., 1997).

Nevertheless, these claims are disputed by authors like Faini (2003), who has used a rich dataset from Carringon and Detragiache (1999), to find that the prospect of emigration actually decreases tertiary education enrolments, because prospective migrants prefer to pursue higher education abroad to improve their chances of long-term migration in the host country.

Indeed, student surveys show that very few students (11.3%) in the net exporting countries believe that education provided by HEIs in their home country prepares them well for the international labour market (Eurostudent, 2017).





Charts 4.11 a and b. Percentage of tertiary enrolments **Source**: EACEA, 2018.

Country key: Albania (AL), Armenia (AM), Azerbaijan (AZ), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Estonia (EE), Kazakhstan (KZ), Lithuania (LT), Moldova (MD), North Macedonia (MK), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK); Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Netherlands (NL), Russia (RU), Spain (ES), Switzerland (CH), United Kingdom (UK).

Moreover, empirical evidence shows that tertiary education sector in the losing countries shrunk over the past two decades. Statistical data show that their tertiary education enrolment fell from 1.5 million in 2013 to 1.2 million in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020). Charts 4.11 a and b (above)

compare enrolment changes for the winners and losers, showing that (with some exceptions) while the student population is growing in winning countries, it is shrinking in the losers.

To illustrate, while Denmark reported a 30% increase in tertiary enrolment from 2009 to 2014, most of the losers reported a steep decline of -20% (up to -45.8% in Romania) (EACEA, 2018). While some might see this decline as the outcome of demographic changes, the percentage of enrolment among young people (18-34-year olds) exclude this explanation. Bologna implementation reports show that between 2008 and 2014 tertiary enrolment rates among young people rose on average 2.1% for the winners, and fell on average -1.3% for the losers, falling up to -8.8 in Romania and -5.6% in Lithuania (EACEA, 2018). Thus, this fall in demand for tertiary education, which has followed the increase in the outward mobility rates, shows that a fewer share of young people in the losing countries are going to university.

b.2 remittances and investments

Another argument in favour of higher levels of degree mobility is that even when it leads to *brain drain*, it still has the potential to help the economy of the sending country by enhancing Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and remittances (Swing, 2018; Lucas, 2005). However, the relationship between emigration and FDIs is well studied, and many authors argue that the stock of tertiary-educated labour is key in attracting FDI to developing countries (Bhaumik & Dimova, 2013; Miyamoto, 2003). In an empirical study, using country-level panel data from 55 developing countries for a period of thirty years, Kheng et al. found that:

> …human capital and FDI have a positive and mutually reinforcing relationship, which is statistically significant. An increase in tertiary enrolment rate leads to a relatively large increase in FDI **and vice versa**. We also find some evidence to support the view that human capital is becoming an important determinant of FDI inflows over time.
>
> (Kheng et al., 2017, p.355, emphasis added)

Therefore, by losing their human capital, the losers are more likely to become even less attractive to FDIs. Congruently, statistical data do not support the claim that FDIs have risen together with the losers' high emigration rates.

Chart 4.12 (below) shows that in the last decade, the total FDIs for the losers has fluctuated, but nevertheless, it dropped by 60%, from 32.5 quintillion in 2009 to 20.8 quintillion in 2019 (e.g. In 2014 Lithuania fell to $183 million from $1.8 billion in 2010) (OECD, 2019b; WB, 2020).

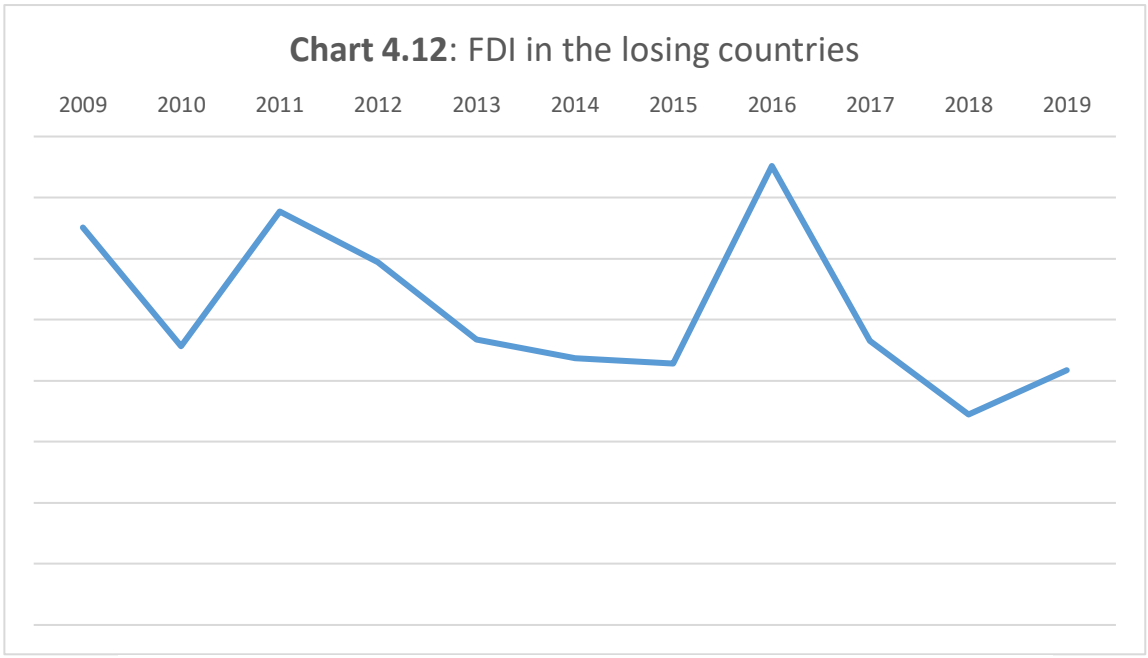


Figure 4.12 – Foreign Direct Investment in the losing countries **Source**: OECD, 2019b

Secondly, while it may be true that migrants send money home, some authors question the positive impact of remittances on the economy of the sending country (Clemens & Mckenzie, 2018; Acosta et al., 2009, Gupta et al., 2009). Collier (2013) has estimated that on average, the annual remittance is 1000 $ per migrant, arguing that this amount could have been easily earned had they stayed in their home country. Moreover, other authors have argued that lowering barriers to mobility decreases remittances because migrants tend to bring their relatives to the host country, instead of sending money back (Collier, 2013; Beine et al., 2003). Indeed, in a comprehensive study Faini (2002) has shown that educated migrants tend to remit less because they are more likely to stay longer and bring their relatives with them. These theoretical concerns are supported by empirical data, which show that in the last decade remittances fell in seven of the losing countries by an average of -18%, decreasing by -49.3% for Azerbaijan and -27.4% for Albania (IFAD, 2017).

However, while remittances are in decline in most of the losers, there is an increasing capital flow from the sending countries to the host ones. Oxford Economics estimates that £5.4 billion of the off-campus expenditure of international students is funded from abroad, in addition to the £4.6 billion in tuition fees paid by European students (UniversitiesUK, 2017).

This financial support often comes from governments grants and publicly subsidised loans. As discussed above, the majority of Bologna members provide portable financial aid to their outbound students (EACEA, 2018). Thus, in other words, the governments of the losing countries are contributing significant funds to the education system of the winners.

Another financial source for education is the families from the sending countries, which support students abroad (i.e. remittances in reverse). Using a panel data from Eurostudent (2017) and European Youth Portal (EU, 2014), combined with data from Unesco (UIS, 2016), I have estimated that every year circa 4 billion Euros flow from the losers to the winners of Bologna to support their high outward mobility rates financially (see Appendix 4.1).

Finally, students' financial contribution is not limited to their time in school, as confirmed by statistics on Alumni donations (CASE, 2019a; CASE, 2019b). For example, hart 4.13 (below) shows an incremental trend in Alumni donations, emphasising the importance of this source of revenue for universities. Therefore, being attractive to international students increases the probability of long-term financial benefits.

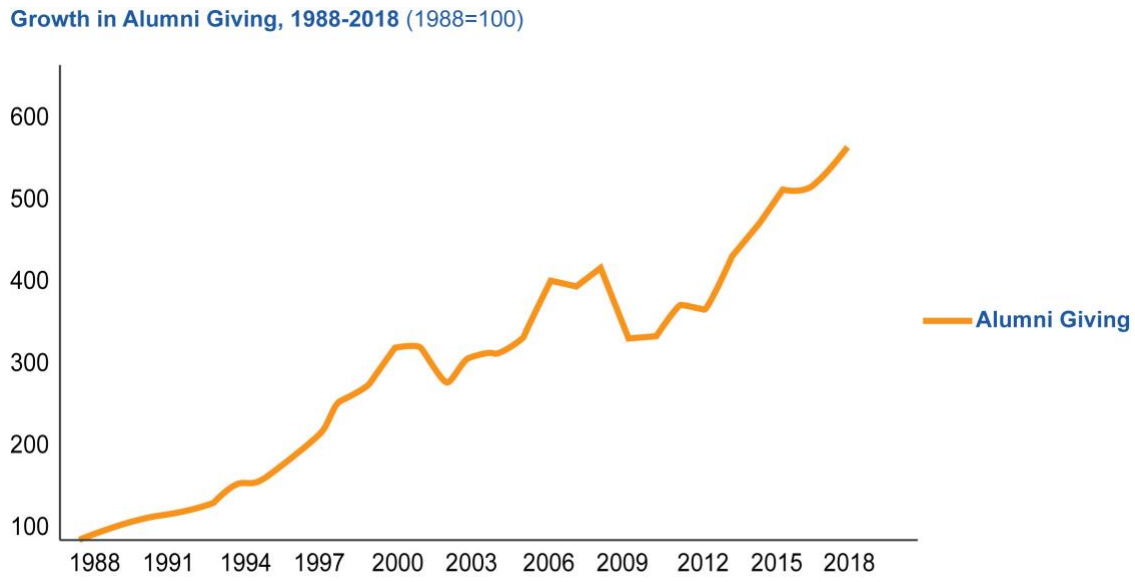


Chart 4.13 Growth in Alumni Giving in the last 30 years **Source**: CASE, 2019a, 2019b

For instance, in 2017, more than 40% of alumni donations in Europe and the biggest individual donations came from international students (CASE, 2018; Weale, 2018). Furthermore, internationally attractive HEIs are in a better position to attract higher alumni donations, for they often attract students with a high likelihood of success (and wealth), which consequently leads to more donations in the future. To illustrate, Chart 4.14 (below) shows that elite universities receive the highest share of alumni donations compared to other HEIs. On the other hand, losing high percentages of students deprives HEIs from the losing countries of potential sources of long-term revenues.

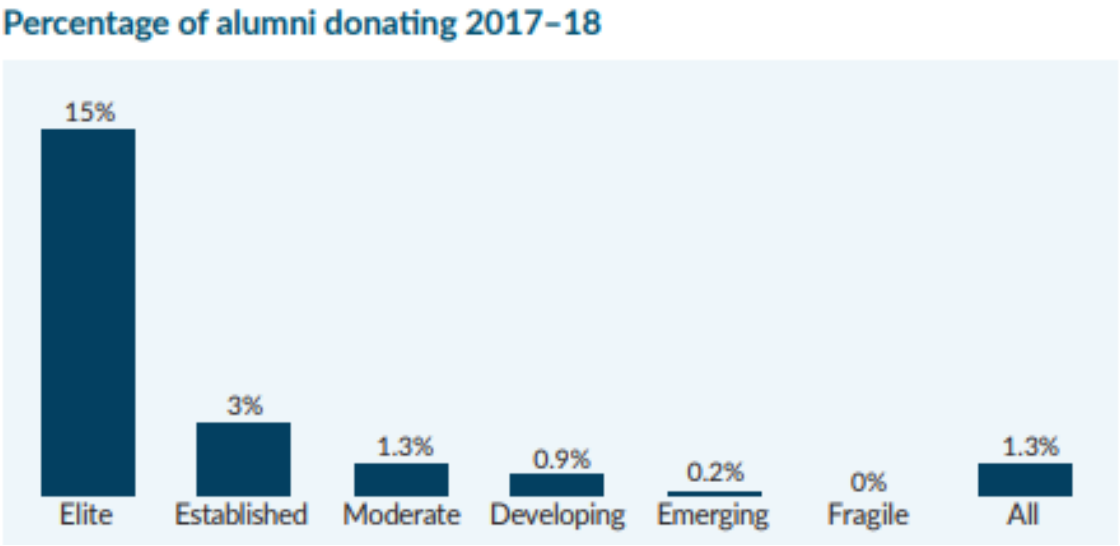


Chart 4.14 Percentage of alumni donating per category of university **Source**: CASE, 2019a

In sum, high outward mobility has several economic ramifications for the losers, from shrinking their education sector and decline in demand for tertiary education to transferring financial capital towards the winning countries. Therefore, it becomes clear that pursuing an agenda that promotes higher outward mobility is not in line with the economic interests of the losers.

c. The Political impact

While many governments have seen it as an opportunity to reap financial benefits, student mobility can also be beneficial in other forms, including increasing cultural and political influence, which is often referred to as soft power (see chapter 2). It is often argued that mobility is an instrument to “build a sense of a common cultural and civic European identity”

(EUA, 2003, August p.29). Indeed, European culture and the ambition to increase European soft power is visible in the text of the founding declaration of Bologna:

> [We must not] forget that Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well… Universities were born in Europe... Our four countries boast some of the oldest…
>
> (Sorbonne communique, 1998)
>
> The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.
>
> (Bologna Declaration, 1999)

Consequently, as discussed above, twenty years on, the reputation of European Higher Education has been enhanced, and the soft power of Bologna in education has grown globally (Moscovitz & Zahavi, 2019). Congruently, the Soft Power Index (Portland, 2020), which ranks countries based on their global influence in the policy domain of education, shows that all the winners have increased their soft power in recent years. This soft power reflects the international attractiveness of their education system and is often exercised through mobile students. To illustrate, Straubhaar (2000) has observed that, after they leave, international students become global promoters of the culture of the host country where they are educated. In contrast, taking into consideration the discussion above about the attractiveness of their education systems, the losers are more likely to emerge as "consumers" of cultural influence, which often requires giving up or reducing the influence of their culture and traditions. The results of the soft power index shown in Table 4.4 (below) support this proposition.

Table 4.4 Soft Power Index – Education

	2015			2019		
	Top 5	**Top 10**	**Top 30**	**Top 5**	**Top 10**	**Top 30**
Winners	2	5	11	3	6	13
Losers	0	0	0	0	0	0
EU countries	2/30	6/30	19/30	4/30	7/30	21/30

Source: Portland, 2020

The second political argument in favour of higher mobility is that it helps in democratising the sending countries. Several authors have argued that students educated in democratic countries push for democratic reforms in their home countries (Docquier et al., 2015;

Spilimbergo; 2009). Coming from a different point of view, Hirschman (1978) makes a similar point, arguing that high emigration rates among dissidents in the 19th century reduced the extent of social protests, making it safer for governments to democratise, which eventually led to the universal suffrage.

Contrary to this point of view, Krasnev & Holmes (2020) argue that high emigration levels of young and highly educated people have deprived Eastern European countries of the voters who could push for democratic reforms, and has increased the political weight of voters who are sympathetic to authoritarianism and populism. Similarly, Collier (2013) argues that the high emigration rates of educated people deprive countries of active citizens who are more likely to increase pressure for democratic reforms. This perspective is supported by data from the Freedom House's report "Nations in Transit", which shows that the losers are indeed becoming less democratic, not more.

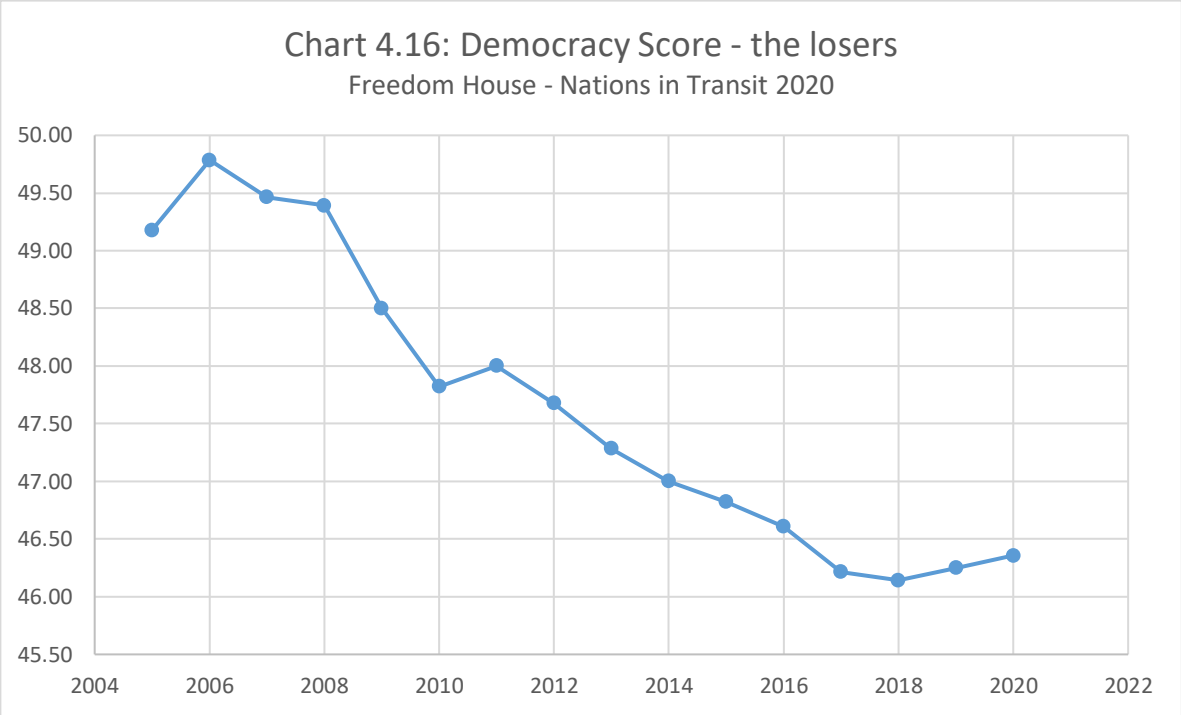


Chart 4.16 National in Transit report. The scores for the losers between 2004 and 2020 **Source**: Freedom House, 2020

Chart 4.16 (above) shows that their scores are much lower now than they were two decades ago (Freedom house, 2020). There is an average 2-point decline in electoral processes, 2.5-point decline in civil society, 4.5-point decline in independent media, and a 1-point decline in local democratic governance. In other words, the empirical reality contradicts the optimistic

view that higher mobility will make sending countries more democratic; indeed, it is making them less democratic, which may, in turn, lead even more people to emigrate.

Becoming part of the Bologna club

I argued above that the policy agenda of Bologna does not represent the interests of the losers, and indeed it is detrimental to them. However, Bologna might be considered a club, and as such, it has membership costs, which may be borne irrespective whether the members are winning or losing from the cooperation, as discussed in the following section.

As mentioned above, every two years the ministers of the Bologna membership meet to decide a list of joint commitments, which often require difficult reforms, such as the degree structure reform, and introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Musselin (2009) has explained that the implementation of the new degree structure has brought significant transformations to HEIs, including a restructuring of the academic curricula and university governing structures. However, these reforms require significant sacrifices and put a considerable strain on governments and HEIs, especially those in the developing countries that have scarce economic and human resources (Reinalda, 2008).

Secondly, introducing new degrees has brought confusion to the academic communities and labour markets, and many have questioned their employability (see Sin & Wende, 2012). Some people have seen the new bachelor's degree as incomplete, or "not so full" as the old degrees, as one of the founders of Bologna put it during the interview:

> I introduced two degrees, 3 and 2, which meant that you try to learn enough of the content of your specialities, mathematics, language mainly in the first 3 year, and you got your first degree, a proper degree, **but not so...[sigh] full as was the one in 4 years.**
>
> (BP01, Minister of Education, one of the four founders of Bologna)

Moreover, it has been observed that Bologna reforms have contributed to inflation of university degrees (see Musselin, 2009). Other commentators have pointed to the fact that such reforms have made governments replace traditional and reputable degrees with new Master's programs promoted by Bologna (Mause, 2013). Consequently, many students, fearing a devaluation of their undergraduate degrees, have chosen to pursue graduate studies, against

their initial preference. For instance, while only 40% of students pursue a master's degree in countries with a long tradition in bachelor's degrees (e.g. the UK), up to 96 % of their peers do so in other European countries that introduced the new degrees promoted by Bologna (Corbett, 2005). As Schomburg and Teichler, (2011, p.271) summarise:

> A mix of warnings by university professors about the incompleteness of Bachelor study at universities, half-hearted curricular reforms, cautious views by employers and uncertainties...has led to such high rates of further study.

Thirdly, by participating in Bologna, governments have allowed the intervention of supranational actors in a policy domain that has been protected by the principle of subsidiarity (Corbett, 2006; Papatsiba, 2006). Therefore, they have willingly limited their capacity to govern education, by coordinating national policies with internationally agreed standards, that are decided collectively in the Bologna ministerial conferences (Neave & Veiga, 2012). Furthermore, the ideology that underpins Bologna pushes even further for a limited role of governments in regulating higher education, as the following passage illustrates.

> In the spirit of enhancing mobility, we advocate that countries pass on the flexibilities of the Bologna framework to the higher education institutions and **restrict the state regulation of study courses to a minimum**.
> **National rules should not be a barrier** for individual mobility and university cooperation. Therefore, we will **avoid rigid regulations**....
>
> (Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA, art.7, para 1, emphasis added)

Finally, following Bologna's commitments, such as delivering courses in English or running information campaigns for mobility requires a deviation of funds from other national priorities. To illustrate, a small country like Slovenia has spent 57 million Euros in two years to implement its internationalisation strategy, which includes mobility grants, language skills training and information campaigns (EACEA, 2018, p.245). Moreover, being an intergovernmental project, Bologna is mainly supported by its members, who dedicate their financial and human resources to support Bologna's ministerial conferences and its day-to-day activity, which involves the work of the secretariat, BFUG, Working Groups and other governing bodies.

In sum, Bologna membership comes with costs for countries and HEIs that participate in this cooperation, which are on top of the costs induced by the policy agenda that it promotes.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the centrality of mobility to the Bologna process and discussed the ways in which this policy agenda promotes and encourages higher levels of outward mobility from the losing countries. I argued that this agenda does not represent the interests of the latter, by emphasising the agenda-setting role of the winners, and by highlighting its link to the global agenda in the education of powerful transnational actors. I discussed the case of imbalanced mobility and mobility targets, to show that when the interests of the losers contradict those of the winners, the interest of the winners take precedence.

I went on to discuss evidence of the one-directional flows of students which have contributed to the emergence of winners and losers. I then discussed the social, economic and political implications of imbalanced mobility. I showed that this migration corridor has contributed to the concentration of human capital and knowledge in the winning countries, while leading to brain drain for the losers. I showed that losing high percentages of talented students has harmed the losers' efforts to improve the quality of education and foster research and innovation. Regarding the economic impact of outward mobility, I showed that the education demand and supply in the losing countries has fallen, whereas outbound students are transferring significant financial resources from the losers to the winning countries, in the process of reverse-remittances. I then discussed how Bologna has helped the winners increase their soft power in education, whereas the losers, contrary to some theoretical expectations, have reversed in their path towards democracy. In the concluding section, I analysed the membership costs of Bologna, emphasising that the losers have exhausted their limited resources in undertaking costly reforms, faced inflation of university credentials, and lost control over their higher education policies.

As I argued in chapter 1, the losers have had better alternatives to Bologna, but they have willingly chosen to embark on this path, remain loyal to it, and not voice discontent. In the next chapters I unpack the losers' consent, by focusing on the cases of Albania and Lithuania.

Chapter 5 – The light that failed

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> In situations of disorientation, crisis, and search for meaning, actors are in particular likely to rethink who and what they and others are, and may become...
> (March & Olsen, 2011, p.11)

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 4, I carried out a macro-level analysis of the Bologna process (henceforth Bologna), identifying the winners and losers of this policy agenda, and discussing the implications for the latter group. Here, I bring the analysis to the national level, focusing on two cases of losers. Bearing in mind that global processes cannot be understood without looking into the local contexts where they are adopted (Holmes, 2001, p.396), I explore the national stage where international agendas meet national priorities and get translated into local meanings. To that end, this study provides a bottom-up perspective of the Europeanisation process.

Thus, I start this chapter by presenting a retrospective account of the losers' decision to jump on the bandwagon, striving to elucidate their motivations to participate in this cooperation. I focus on the historical, political, and economic circumstances under which a 'cognitive consensus' emerged about the country's political and ideological orientation. To that end, I discuss what Bologna offers to the policy elites in both countries, and how they understood this process before they jumped on the bandwagon. However, I argue that consensus does not just emerge, it is manufactured through soft governing tools, which are underpinned by the power of attraction of Europe. Next, I discuss the Europeanisation process, focusing on the power of ideas and the impact of a dominant discourse that is employed to establish a set of shared meanings that shape the common understanding and steer policy compliance.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how these countries have diligently implemented Bologna commitments and followed this policy agenda hoping to improve the quality of their higher education. Then, I analyse the outcomes of two decades of reforms, vis-a-vis their expectations from this process, focusing on the quality of higher education in both countries, and their attractiveness to internationally mobile students. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the vicious cycle of high emigration rate, which produces even more emigration of human and financial capital.

5.2 Jumping on the bandwagon

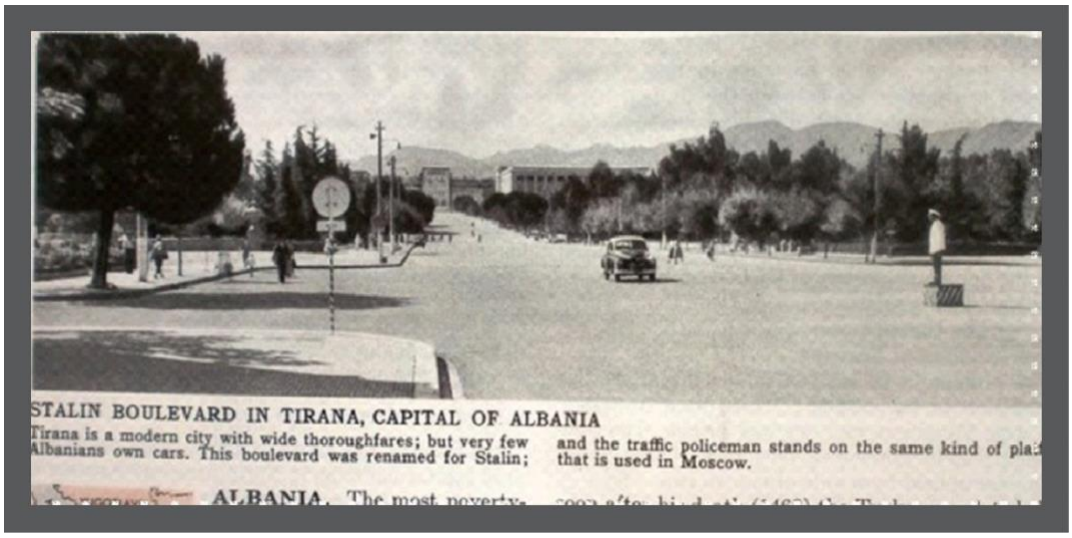


Image Nr. 5.1: Picture of Tirana, in the 1960s. There were only a dozen cars in the whole city, but the government borrowed the concept of traffic platform from Moscow and placed a policeman to direct the (imaginary) traffic.

The first case study is **Albania**, which is located in South-Eastern Europe (the Western Balkans) and is inhabited by 2.8 million people (INSTAT, 2020). Although it has progressed economically over the past three decades, Albania remains among the poorest EHEA members, with a GDP per capita of 4'100 $ (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2020a).

After the Second World War Albania lined up with the Eastern Bloc, and although it never became part of the USSR or Yugoslavia, it was in line with the ideological orientation of the Soviet Union (see Ngjela, 2011; Aliaj, 2010). That was also expressed in the higher education system, which was established and designed under Soviet influence (Duro, 2012).

As discussed in chapter 4, the fall of the Berlin wall and eventually the collapse of the Soviet Union, brought many post-communist states to a breaking point, where the old order was delegitimised (Wollmann, 2006). Accordingly, Albania embarked on a new path towards a major political and economic shift from centralised to a free-market economy, and from dictatorship to liberal democracy (Abrahams, 2015). This new political reorientation encouraged political reforms underpinned by 'liberal' ideas on the way in which societies and institutions should organise and operate (see Hogan-Brun, 2007). However, the progress has not been linear, and when Albania joined Bologna in 2003, it was still recovering from the political unrest of 1997 and the Kosovo war (see Abrahams, 2015; Baze, 2010).



Image 5.2 Postcard of Vilnius during the Soviet era. The picture is staged to display a fake affluent life of the city. The number of vehicles is artificially increased, to hide the fact that cars in Vilnius were rare at that time.

The second case of the Bologna's losers is **Lithuania**, which is part of North-Eastern Europe and is inhabited by 2.8 million people (Statistics Lithuania, 2019). Lithuania has gone a long way since the early 1990s, and nowadays, it is classified a developed nation, with a GDP per capita of 14'000 $ (World Bank, 2020a). However, although it has become an OECD member, it still lags behind other developed European nations (IMF, 2015; OECD, 2018).

Lithuania had been part of the USSR, but it broke ties with it in the early 1990s when the country embarked on a process of political and economic transformation, like the rest of the Eastern bloc (Snyder, 2004). As discussed below, these transformations were driven by an ideological reorientation and the aspiration for economic progress, which was encapsulated in the motto "*living like Swedes*" (Ekiert, Kubik, & Vachudova, 2007, p.11).

Moreover, as these countries transitioned from authoritarian regimes to democratic governance, their education systems went through stages of transition, from the ideological shift to the transformation of macro-level structures (McLeish, 1998). Thus, the Lithuanian higher education system, underwent a series of transformations underpinned by the ideals of academic autonomy and openness to the world (Martinaitis et al., 2016). Congruently, the policy elite of Lithuania decided to join the Sorbonne initiative, and in 1999 the country signed the Bologna declaration.

a. The motivating force

March and Olsen (2011) argue that in moments of crisis, actors rethink their role and identity, and, in seeking for legitimate answers, they either return to a glorious past or follow an existing model that is seen as legitimate. As I argue below, Albania and Lithuania did both things: They returned to their European history, which was interrupted by the dictatorship; and embraced the Western model of higher education, which was widely accepted as legitimate.

Following the political developments of the early 1990s, Eastern European countries sought ways to wipe out their Soviet influence in higher education, which entails matters of identity, but also perceptions of efficiency (Silova, 2009). Accordingly, a broad consensus emerged among the Lithuanian society to break free from Moscow's influence (Matonytė & Morkevičius, 2009). This sentiment can be recognised in the way in which policy actors discuss their past:

> I never heard someone who could say that in the Soviet time our university was better. We were completely isolated. We could not travel. The research was most of the physical sciences, and we were working for Russian industry.
>
> (LG03, President of Lithuanian Conference of Rectors)

Hence, as the old system collapsed, and they transitioned from authoritarian regimes to democratic governance, countries like Lithuania started to look back to their glorious past (Hogan-Brun, 2007; Hyde-Price, 1996). Legro (2005, p.6) argues that ideas are embedded in the collective memories of societies, and the Lithuanian society still remembered its place in the 'European family'(Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013; Matonytė & Morkevičius, 2009, p.984). However, the aspiration of 'returning to Europe', was also forward-looking, for it represented a way to embrace economic and political progress (Pavlovaite, 2003, p.244).

> T]he reasons [for reforms] were very simple: to break away from the Soviet legacy and reform ourselves according to the best foreign practices...
>
> (LG13, leader of the Lithuanian ENIC, email correspondence, 06.06.2018)

> You know, of course, maybe, [universities] were not very happy, but they understood, that they should work **like other European universities**… in this case [of Bologna] they were not against, because they understood that they will not become so attractive in [the] future [if] **they keep this Soviet system**.
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, the signatory of the Bologna declaration)

Similarly, the Albanian society was eager to break free from the totalitarian regime that isolated the country from the rest of the world (Ngjela, 2011). The antithesis of the system that they left behind in the 1990s was represented in the freedom of movement, which was expressed

in the protesters' chant: 'Liri, democracy' (Freedom and democracy) (Abrahams, 2015). Congruently, the overarching goal of Bologna represented the aspiration to travel without barriers and to seek employment within the European continent. Moreover, as in Lithuania, the policy elite of Albania found the same answers to its quest for a new identity, which was underpinned by the aspiration to become prosperous 'like the rest of Europe'.

> Albania was a closed society, and higher education had an Eastern influence. Participation in the Bologna Charter accelerated the Western orientation of our Higher Education at all levels.
>
> (AP01, Albanian Minister, signatory of Albania's membership in Bologna)

In chapter 2, I discuss the power of attraction (Nye, 1990) as a way to alter actors' preferences and steer policy congruence in higher education. Accordingly, erstwhile foes had now become allies, and Albanians turned into one of the most Euro-enthusiasts people, with 80% of the public holding a positive image of the EU, and only 2% a negative one (EC, 2014). This sentiment is partly related to the understanding of Europe as associated with freedom of movement and economic progress (Dalipaj, 2008). Consequently, the soft power of Europe encouraged policy elites in both countries to adopt substantial policy reforms uncritically (Pavovaite, 2003, p.245), and Higher Education did not make an exception (Anweiler, 1992).

> We transitioned from the Soviet system to the Western system. At that time, we actually regained our right to be a part of Western society. [It] was somehow related to the establishment of the identity of the nation... **what was considered as good was to associate with the Western** system…Just to become like them who are prosperous, efficient, very influential in terms of generating new scientific [and] educational ideas.
>
> (LG02, Faculty Dean, Public University)

> As soon as I was exposed [to this model], I realised the importance of this matter because we came from an isolated country, and we would have just benefits from such an opening in the field of higher education in particular. But in any other area, it would have been equally good because ***it was a European initiative***...
>
> (AP01, Minister, signatory of Albania's membership in Bologna)

In this context, Bologna was eagerly embraced, because it was perceived as part of the EU integration process (chapters 2 and 6), as shown in Albania's membership application letter:

> The Ministry of Education and Science considers the development of Higher Education Reform, on the basis of the principles of the Bologna Declaration and the adherence of Albania to this process, as a hugely significant element to the ***integration of Albania into the European Union***…
>
> (MoE, document Nr.2313, 16.04.2003, emphasis added)

b. Manufacturing consent

While there is ample evidence that the decision to join Bologna was the outcome of a dominant consensus that emerged in the early 1990s, it is important to bear in mind that consensus does not just happen, it is manufactured. Hence, as it was discussed in the theoretical chapter (chapter 2), there are a set of soft governing tools that have contributed to the cognitive consensus on Bologna that is observed in the national contexts of both Albania and Lithuania. *Firstly*, there has been a powerful discourse emanating from international organisations that provided new ways of thinking about education, which influenced the common understanding of the policy elites (Borrás & Radaelli, 2011). It promoted a new role for education in the Economy of Knowledge, placing it at the centre of the economic development of countries and their international competitiveness (Ravinet, 2008). Subsequently, a new cognitive consensus started to emerge on how higher education should operate and whom should it serve, encouraging several profound reforms underpinned by an ideological transition, embracing neo-liberal ideas in education (Silova, 2009; Hogan-Brun, 2007; Ekiert et al., 2007). Concepts like *internationalisation*, *competition* and *marketisation* of education started to dominate the public discourse and change the expectations of the policy elite (Martinaitis et al., 2016).

> The primary purpose of this Higher Education Reform is to explore the role [of education] in building and preparing capacities that enable our country to have a dignified integration into the European economy of knowledge.
>
> (Memushi, then Albanian minister, 2002, October 09)

> [Universities] were not actually ready for that [to join Bologna]. They were not, but the competition was not considered a bad thing**. Competition always is good,** and somehow it pushes them to raise their quality and start to compete…
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

As discussed in chapter 6, a new vocabulary emerged to facilitate the transmission of ideas from the global level to the national context (Novova, 2002). This common frame of reference shaped the way in which actors discuss education policies, understand their problems, and think about solutions (Johansson, 2008). A case in point is the following paper published by two Lithuanian researchers in 2009, in which they advocate for higher mobility, presenting it as the only alternative for Lithuania to move forward and keep up with advanced nations. However, there is little evidence to support such claims.

> Actors in the developing economies must have the capacity to acquire new knowledge - to learn new ways of doing things - if they are to compete in the world economy… The isolated economy is not able to be advanced and competitive at the international level. Therefore, **highly skilled human capital migration appears to be as one of the most essential elements, contributing to countries economy progress**...
>
> (Daugeliene & Marcinkeviciene, 2009, pp.49-51)



4 / E MËRKURË, 4 Nëntor 2009

Fjala e Ministrit të Arsimit dhe Shkencës në takimin e Analizës vjetore të Arsimit të Qarkut të Tiranës

Arsim evropian, Shqipëri evropiane

Mirdita të gjithëve!

Takimi me ju është një kënaqësi e veçantë pasi ne jemi takuar edhe shumë herë bashkë. Ju i njihni mirë objektivat e Qeverisë Berisha 2, disa prej të cilave në hedhjen e hapave për realizimin e tyre i dëgjuam edhe në raport të kësaj analize. Unë dëshiroj sot të ndalem me ju në tri çështje kryesore që mendoj t'i bashkëbisedojmë.

E para, është fjala për zhvillimin e veprimtarive në shërbim të nxënësve.

Të nderuar zotërinj! Në shkollat tona, punojnë mësues të përkushtuar dhe të talentuar që jgithë jetën e tyre ua kanë kushtuar nxënësve. Shkolla ka një traditë të shkëlqyer në këtë drejtim dhe, këtë traditë duhet ta zhvillojë më tej. Shkolla nuk mund të jetë e destinuar vetëm për kohën brenda orarit të mësimit. Ajo duhet të jetë shumë më tepër se kaq, shkolla duhet të jetë shtëpia e dytë për nxënësit, duhet të jetë po aq miqësore sa edhe shtëpia e

vendeve të Bashkimit Evropian pasi kemi një përvojë të shkëlqyer në marrëdhëniet me pushtetin lokal, tregues i këtyre viteve të fundit, duke thithur investimet dhe realizuar ato cilësisht.

Të nderuar përfaqësues të pushtetit vendor dhe drejtorë shkollash!

Qarku i Tiranës ka një veçori specifike ai ka nevoja sigurisht për arsim të mesëm të përgjithshëm por ai ka nevoja të ngashme të menjëhershme për shtimin dhe fuqizimin e arsimit të mesëm profesional në shumë drejtime. Qarku i Tiranës ka specifika të dallueshme për zhvillimin e këtij lloj arsimi profesional. Ne do të po-

Image 5.3: Tafaj (2009, November 04) Albanian minister of education: “European Education, European Albania”.

Similarly, these ideas were promulgated in the public discourse by prominent politicians and policymakers in both countries, as illustrated in the following quotations, as well as in the newspaper article displayed in image 5.3 (above), where the adjective 'European' is used as a synonym of progress and modernity.

> Higher education, in particular, is becoming more influential in the construction of knowledge-based economies… Investments in higher education generate great benefits that are essential for economic development…
>
> (Memushi, then Albanian minister, 2004, December 04, pp. 2 – 8)

> I am convinced that strong universities and strong colleges are key to strong Lithuania. But our universities and colleges will grow stronger provided there is **competition**, **effective management** and curricula oriented to the needs of the people and the **requirements of economy**…
>
> (Adamkus, then Lithuanian president, the annual address to the nation, 2000)

Secondly, as discussed in the next chapter, Bologna has been part of an ideological path that both countries had taken much earlier. The political developments discussed above, led countries like Lithuania and Albania, who share a past as members of the Warsaw pact, to

seek new alliances with the West, and seek for membership in international organisations like the EU (Matonytė & Morkevičius, 2009). Thus, by the time it joined Bologna, Lithuania had already signed a Free Trade Agreement with the European Commission (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania [MoFA], 2014) and it was negotiating its membership to the World Trade Organisation (Tracevskis & Vasiliauskas, 2000). Around the same time, Albania was negotiating a Stabilisation Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU and signed it in 2006 (EU, 2006). Moreover, they reinforced their relationship with the Council of Europe, which led to the adoption of treaties, such as the Lisbon Convention (Nr. 165, 1997).

This heightened international cooperation defined a general trajectory of political reforms in the public administration, which led to the path of Bologna in higher education. As discussed in chapter 2, a process in which past decisions narrow the scope of future choices is path-dependent (Hacker,2002; Pierson, 2000). Congruently, as discussed in chapter 6, the decision to join Bologna was influenced by previous choices that countries had made in terms of their ideological orientation and the course of development:

> First of all, you know, at that time we still felt like kind of province of Europe, you know. Where still was [felt] very much this Soviet heritage in these things. We wanted to be more compatible [with] the European system. At that time, it was a **general politics to harmonise all our system**, not only our educational system, to the European system. Market, universities and so on…
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

> European integration has been our dominant paradigm, and it continues. And in each field, each of us had its sector. We expected in the higher education sector, first as academics and then as entrepreneurs. We expected Europeanisation, be that on the label, or content-wise...
>
> (AG08, President of the largest private HEI in Albania)

Moreover, the support received from international organisations opened the gate to external influence in setting the agenda of the policy domain of higher education. Their limited resources and the lack of expertise to undertake the necessary reforms in higher education (Hajderi, 26.06.1998), made international help indispensable for both countries. Accordingly, several international actors, including the World Bank, Council of Europe and the EU, offered their support for Albania and Lithuania through programs such as Tempus and "*Phare multi-country on Higher Education"* (EC, 2015; Lithuania Country reports, 2003; Rose, 1998). This

help consisted mainly of capacity building and purchasing international expertise (Mesuesi, 11.03.2009; 04.06.2003; Hajderi, 2000, June 16). On the one hand, this help created strong financial incentives for policymakers and interest groups to comply with the policy agenda of these international organisations.

> We essentially did not have the money to do research here. We had a very small salary at that time…
>
> (LG02, dean of faculty, Public HEI, Lithuania)

> If there was one Marshall plan after World War II, it was Tempus… Imagine universities so utterly abandoned by governments as they had no finances… [this program] economically saved the academics of the Eastern [Europe]. It was a very good source of income, you know what I mean?
>
> (AP06, Albanian minister)

> The director of the Tempus office for Albania…[explained] that there are 2.5 million euros available [for] projects that aim to support the exchange of professors and students between Albania and European countries. The purpose is [to encourage] HEIs to introduce the standards of the Bologna Declaration, and integrate the Albanian higher education in Europe.
>
> (Mesuesi, 25.12.2002)

On the other hand, it made these countries susceptible to policy solutions promulgated by them. In chapter 2, I discuss the crucial role played by the action elites in policymaking processes (Carter & Lawn, 2015; Reed, 2012). In chapter 6, I explain how certain policy solutions are presented as 'good practices' that provide the same outcomes regardless of the context, and therefore they should be discussed outside of the political debate (see Grundman & Stehr, 2012; Ozga, 2018). Congruently, as discussed in chapter 6, these international experts, who belong to the action elite, have played a crucial role in framing the problems of higher education and providing the ministers with a limited repertoire of policy ideas, which are represented as universal, decontextualised solutions (Lingard & Ozga, 2007).

> In analysing the problems of [higher education] system and in determining the necessary legislative interventions, a notable contribution was given by the 3 missions of the Council of Europe… A positive role in the introduction of new contemporary mechanisms in Higher Education is also played by "Phare Multicountry on Higher Education" program… In drafting [the law on higher education] we took into account all recommendations of the Council of Europe.
>
> (Hajderi, 2000, June 16, pp.1-2)

> The new draft law on higher education is… based on the experience of European legislation on higher education… [and is designed with the help of] renowned European experts of higher education [as] the president of the European Universities Association [and] the World Bank's expert who worked on the higher education master plan…
>
> (Mesuesi 28.03.2007)

Thirdly, the transmission of this policy agenda from the global stage to the national contexts is facilitated through the socialisation of elites. In chapter 2, I discuss the power of socialisation as a soft governing tool employed to steer policy congruence in higher education (Ozga, 2018; Risse 2009; Schimmelfennig 2000). Borzel and Risse (2000, p.8) define *socialisation* as the process "by which actors learn to internalise new norms and rules in order to become members of (international) society". Accordingly, Bologna has encouraged socialisation of policy actors (Musselin, 2009), by shaping their understanding of what is the appropriate way to behave in this international society (see March & Olsen, 2013).

Thus, cooperation with international organisations has helped in forging social relations among international experts and policymakers that operate at the national level. As discussed in chapter 6, these actors have worked side by side, sometimes even sharing the same office space, in shaping higher education policies (interviews with AP02, AP07). Moreover, as shown in chapter 7, the socialisation of policymakers is achieved through participation in international events of Bologna, where ministers and country representatives meet and discuss policy interventions in higher education. This socialisation process has encouraged policy learning and ideological co-optation, which has made the *cognitive consensus* difficult to challenge, even when it goes against the national interests of the losers (see chapters 6 and 7).

> I have been fortunate enough that all the international partners, with whom I have worked during my time [at the ministry], had a progressive mentality… I have learned a lot from them. All these [reforms] would not have been achieved if we had not had such a good relationship... To this day, I still keep in touch with international experts with whom I have collaborated in the ministry. For me, that experience has been another school.
>
> (AP07, director for higher education, Albanian ministry)

At the same time, the same international organisations have financially supported the socialisation of interest groups. As discussed in the next chapter, the implementation of Bologna has been made possible through the international cooperation of university leaders (rectors and deans of faculty) and the academic community. To that end, in the years before Albania applied to become a Bologna member, the EU, Council of Europe and Italian Cooperation funded several conferences, which helped leaders of public HEIs in Albania to forge relationships with their counterparts in other countries (Mesuesi, 13.05.2009; MoE,

2003, April 16; Hajderi, 2002). Similarly, several study visits and academic exchange trips, funded by international organisations, enabled leaders of Albanian HEIs to enrich their international network, and learn from the experience of their European colleagues (Mesuesi, 25.12.2002; Hajderi, 2000, June 16; Interviews with AG09; AG15; AP02; AP07).

> We have had a great collaboration with [our] Italian colleagues, who have sent here [in Albania] a fixed permanent commission for several years... We sent Albanian professors to the respective Italian universities, and they gained experience there and learned how the system worked...
>
> (AP02, director for higher education, Albanian Ministry)

> The first university to implement Bologna has been [ours]. And we have discussed a lot what model to choose. We agreed to choose one Italian university as a model ...Then we said let's see if we can make it a sister university…
>
> (AG09, Rector of the first Albanian HEI to pilot Bologna)

Similarly, Bologna governing structures and the EU has encouraged international cooperation of student councils (ESU, 2020b). In chapter 6 I discuss the case of Albanian students who started collaborating with their peers abroad, by participating in the international network of ESIB, where they got the motivation and the necessary knowledge to push for Bologna reforms back home (AG02 and AG06). Likewise, I show how the agenda of the Lithuanian Student Union (LSS) reflects the priorities of the European Students Union (LG04 and LG06).

5.3 Playing a losing game

Albania and Lithuania joined this cooperation at different times. As one of the signatories of the Bologna declaration, Lithuania joined it in 1999, whereas Albania assumed membership four years later, after two failed attempts (MoE nr.2313, 16.04.2003). Nevertheless, both countries had started reforming their higher education system even before jumping on the bandwagon (see chapter 6). To illustrate, the overarching goal of Bologna to facilitate international recognition of academic qualifications is promoted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997 (Treaty nr.165 of the CoE; EACEA, 2018), which came into effect in 1999 in Lithuania (country report, 2003), and in 2001 in Albania (Law Nr.8834, 22.11.2001). Accordingly, two years before becoming a member, Albania was piloting the degree structures of Bologna and implementing its policies (Hajderi, 2002; MoE nr.2313, 16.04.2003).

Congruently, after assuming membership, both countries became 'model pupils' (see Rinne et al., 2004) in terms of implementing Bologna commitments. In 2005 Albania was already scoring overall 'good performance' in implementing all Bologna commitments, and 'excellent performance' in recognition of degrees acquired abroad (BFUG, 2005). Similarly, Table 5.1 (below) shows that ten years after becoming part of this cooperation, Lithuania was implementing Bologna better than the EHEA average, scoring even higher than most of the winners (OECD, 2010). This commitment to this policy agenda has only strengthened over the years, and their implementation scores have gotten even higher (EACEA, 2018; 2015).

Table Nr. 5.1 - Bologna Implementation Scorecard

2009

	Degree System				Quality Assurance				Recognition					
	2/cycle	Access	NQF	**Score DS**	External	Student	Internat.	**Score QA**	Dip. Supp.	Lisbon	ECTS	RPL	**Score R**	**Total score**
EHEA average	3	3.4	2	2.8	3	2.9	2.6	2.8	2.7	3	2.9	2.3	2.7	2.8
WINNERS	3	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Albania	5	3	3	4	4	4	2	3	4	3	4	1	3	3.3
Lithuania	5	4	1	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	2	4	3.8

Table Nr.5.1 Scores for implementation of the Bologna commitments **Source**: Stocktaking Report, 2009

In more concrete terms, both countries have taken the following steps to implement the policy agenda promoted by Bologna, in order to improve the quality of their higher education system and make it more attractive to internationally mobile students.

Firstly, both countries have carried out legal and administrative steps to facilitate international diploma recognition (BFUG, 2009), by erecting National Centres for Recognition of Diplomas (DCM, 02.2002), introducing ECTS (MoE Nr.164, 19.09.2001), and guiding their HEIs to issue a diploma supplement (MoE, 25.02.2002). Thus, by 2016 Albania had fulfilled two-thirds of the steps in the pathway of National Qualifications Framework implementation, whereas Lithuania had achieved automatic degree recognition for academic purposes, performing even better than most of the founders of Bologna (EACEA, 2018).

Secondly, they have restructured their university degrees to bring them in line with Bologna recommendations (EACEA, 2018). Although both countries have introduced a three-tier degree system (i.e. Bachelor, Master's and Doctorate), only Albania has shortened the time-length of the bachelor degree (Law 9120, 28.07.2003; Law Nr.XI-242, 2009). This shorter degree has reduced the time students spend in school and decreased the amount of money they have to spend on tuition fees. However, as discussed in chapter 4, these shorter degrees have also contributed to degree inflation, pushing more students towards further studies (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011, p.271). Indeed, unlike Lithuania, Albania has one of the highest percentages (75 to 100%) of graduates progressing to master's studies within one year upon completing a bachelor's degree (EACEA, 2018).

Thirdly, both countries have taken many steps to internationalise their education system. The Lithuanian government has developed an internationalisation strategy and has encouraged more than 50% of the HEIs to participate in joint degrees with HEIs abroad (EACEA, 2018). It has also invested millions of Euros in supporting the establishment of degree programs offered in English, aiming to increase the inflow of international students to 10% of the student population by the second decade of Bologna (Lithuanian Ministry of Education [SMM], 2011). Additionally, it has taken significant measures to reform its immigration policies, and to make it easier for inward mobile students to remain in Lithuania upon graduation (Lithuanian State Gazette, 2011, No 50-2440). In Albania, internationalisation has mostly relied on the individual initiative of some HEIs (Interviews with AG09; AG08; AP07).

Fourthly, following Bologna recommendations, they have adopted the 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA' (ESG). Accordingly, both countries have established national centres for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Gov. Res. Nr.60, 21.01.2005; DCM Nr.303, 01.07.1999;), and have become Governmental Member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, 2020). Table 5.1 (above), shows that Lithuania is among the 'best pupils' in implementation of recommendations on quality assurance and transparency (EACEA, 2015; 2018).

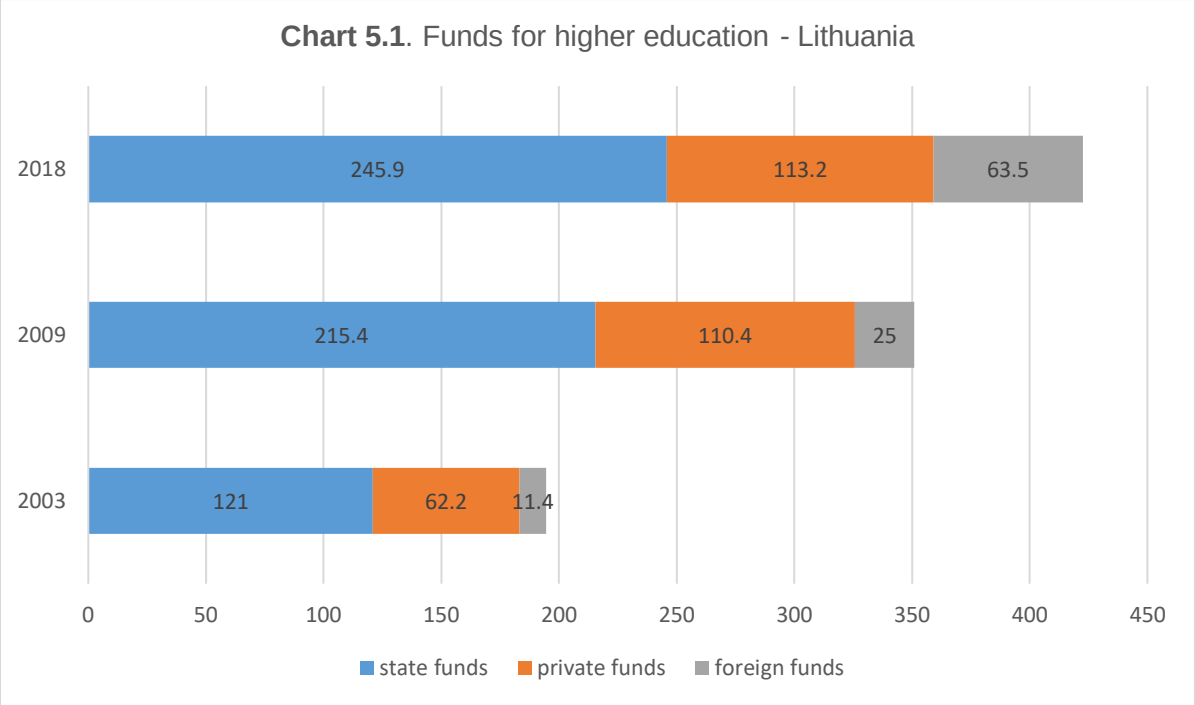


Chart 5.1: Funding for the higher education sector in Lithuania **Source**: Statistics Lithuania, 2020

Fifthly, they have increased their investment in their higher education sector (EACEA, 2018). As discussed below (5.4), both governments have doubled their public expenditure on tertiary education (UIS, 2017). Moreover, chart 5.1 (above) shows that private investments and foreign funds have also significantly increased in the Lithuanian higher education. For instance, between 2004 to 2020, Lithuania has benefited 18.1 billion Euros under the European Structural Fund (EC, 2020b; Ministry of Education of Lithuania [SMM], 2011).

Finally, both countries have encouraged their students to study abroad by offering financial incentives (EACEA, 2018). The economic costs of studying abroad are the main obstacle to even higher outward mobility rates. Accordingly, 66% of students in Lithuania have ranked it as the main obstacle preventing them from studying abroad (Eurostudent, 2017). To that end, it has been one of the main objectives of Bologna to promote portability of funds to students (see chapter 4). Thus, Lithuania has supported its students to study in another EHEA country by offering publicly subsidised loans and grants (EACEA, 2015). Similarly, the Albanian government has provided special scholarships to encourage its best students to study abroad (DCM Nr. 483, 16.07.2014). Congruently, it is marked in 'green' category in the Bologna

Scorecard of 2015, regarding portability of public grants (EACEA, 2015, p.252), which means that it is fulfilling the expectations (see chapter 6, on colour-codes as a soft governing tool).

> …We have established the excellence fund… every Albanian student who will apply to the top 19 best universities in the world, will receive a scholarship from this government.
>
> (Berisha, then Prime Minister of Albania, 02.09.2008)

All these measures, and many more, taken by governments and institutions in both countries, are encouraged by the trust in the efficiency of this policy agenda to improve the quality of higher education, and make it like the rest of Europe (Platis, 5.10. 1998). They were also motivated by an optimistic projection of the future, in which their education sector would continue to expand, as illustrated by this quotation of the Lithuanian president:

> Consistent efforts must be taken to develop the network of colleges, which could form the basis for establishing universities in rural areas. In three years the number of students in Lithuania may exceed 100 000. Then, according to the number of students per 10 000 of the population, Lithuania will catch up with the Scandinavian countries.
>
> (Adamkus, annual address to the nation, 2001)

Moreover, both countries have improved their international position in recent years. As discussed in chapter 4, when they joined this cooperation, not being in the EU placed them in a secondary role in the governing structures of Bologna (Ravinet, 2008). However, in 2004 Lithuania became an EU member (EU, 2020), and in 2009 non-EU countries were allowed to co-chair the BFUG (Louvain Communique, 2009). Thus, during the second decade, they could co-chair Bologna, in 2010 and 2013. On the other hand, Lithuania's membership in the EU and the OECD (IMF, 2019), created new opportunities for its education system to become more internationally attractive. For instance, according to an IOM (2012) report, 75% of international students in Lithuania, declared that the EU membership status was the most important reason for choosing to study in this country.

Yet, congruent to what was discussed in chapter 4, this policy agenda has not worked in the advantage of these countries, and, notwithstanding all the efforts, they have emerged as losers of Bologna, as discussed in the following section.

5.4 Twenty years after

Twenty years later, the higher education system in both countries is not more attractive to international students and is less appealing to domestic ones. Thus, they have seen an even worse net balance of student mobility, with more outbound and few inbound students.

a. International attractiveness

Two decades of reforms have not persuaded more domestic students in Lithuania and Albania to choose their higher education institutions over the ones abroad (see the time-series of student mobility rates in Appendices 5.1 and 5.2). Charts 5.2 and 5.3 (below) show that outward mobility has steadily increased in both countries. In absolute numbers interpolated data (see Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018; Tawfik et al., 2014; Moahmed et al., 2014; Kokaram et al., 1995;) show that outward mobility rose five times for Lithuania and seven times for Albania. As a ratio of all students enrolled in the country, outward mobility rates in Albania went from 13 % in 1998, to an average of 22% in the first decade of Bologna, whereas Lithuania went from 3.8% to an average of 7% in the second decade (Appendix 4.2).

> Students voting with their feet opting for certain universities or going abroad determine the destiny of quite a few higher education institutions which are at the bottom of the pecking order pyramid.
>
> (Leisyte et al., 2018, p.306)

To investigate if these outward mobility trends merely reflect a general increase in the tendency of students to study abroad, charts 5.2 and 5.3 (below) also compare the outward student mobility numbers within the EHEA vis-à-vis other countries. These charts show that while outward mobility towards non-EHEA countries has remained stable, it has steadily increased towards other Bologna members. To illustrate, 95 % of 15’111 Albanian mobile students abroad in 2014, were studying in another Bologna member (EACEA, 2018). These trends are consistent with the shared understanding among the policy elites that Bologna has facilitated student mobility within the European Higher Education Area (Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013). Similarly, 75% of my informants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “Bologna has made it easier for students to study abroad”.

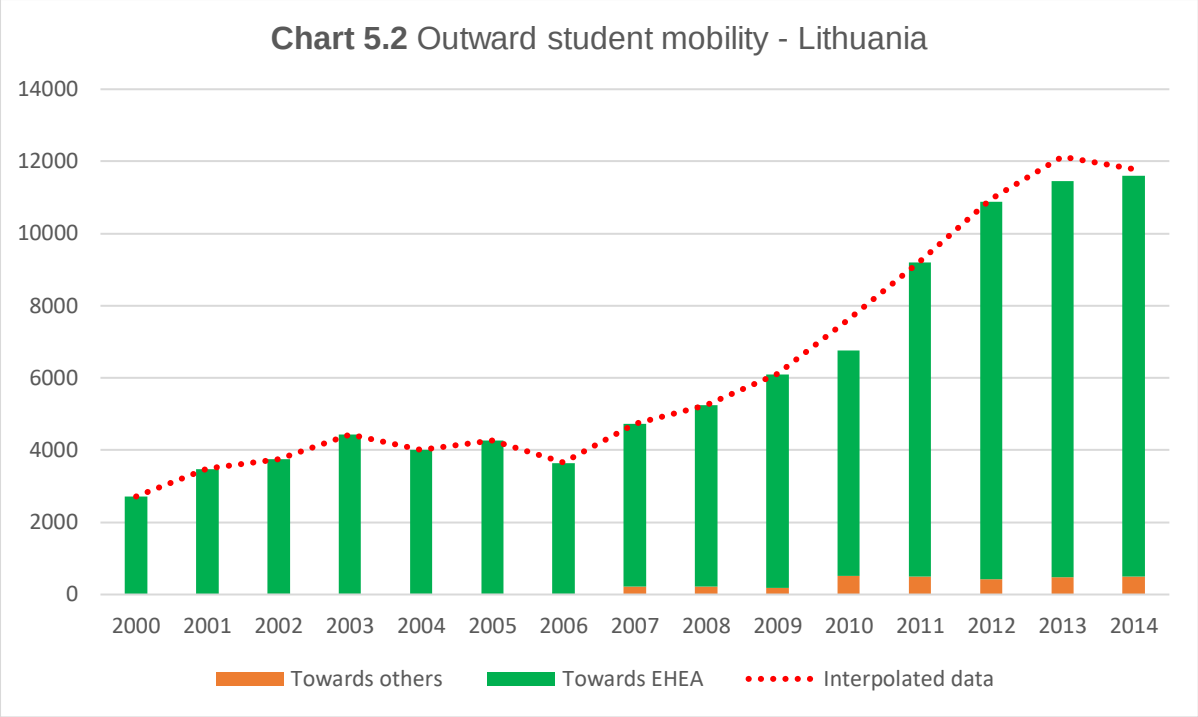


Chart 5.2 Outward mobility towards EHEA and other non-EHEA countries in absolute numbers over the past fifteen years **Source**: Unesco Institute of Statistics (UIS), 2016

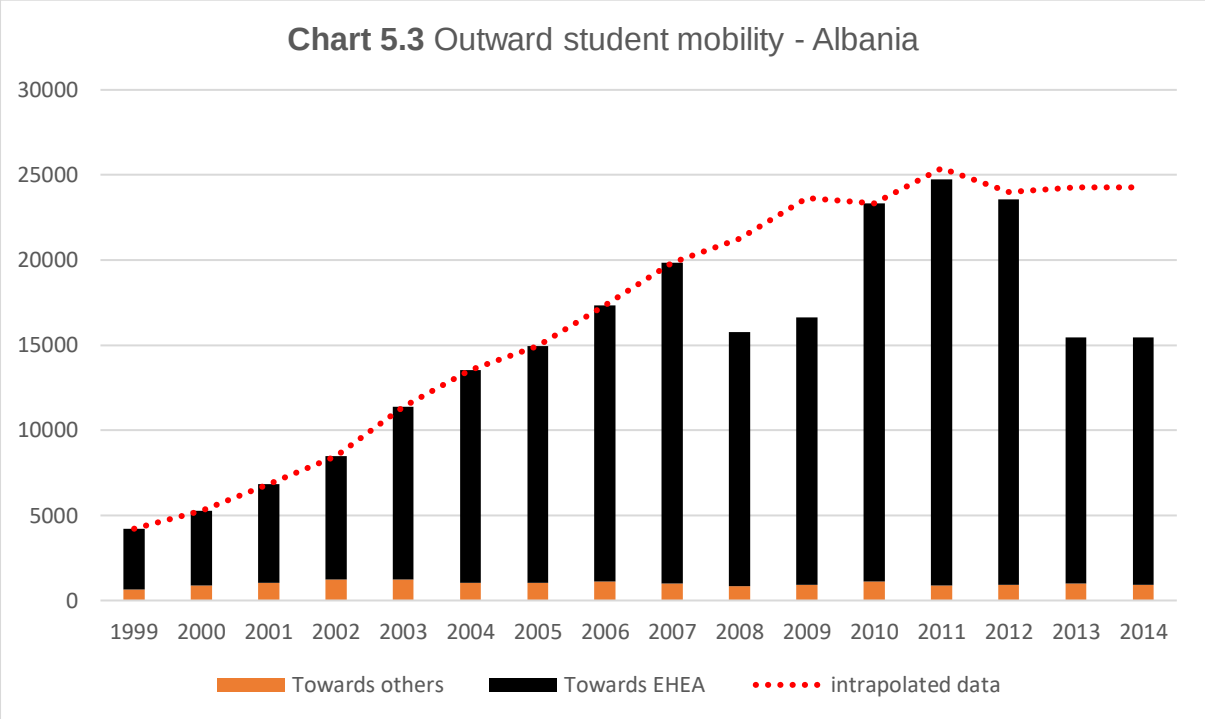


Chart 5.3 Interpolation is used to measure the effect of missing values for outward mobility towards Greece in 2008-2009 and 2013-2015 **Source**: UIS, 2016

> …Bologna process, the change of structure, two-tier system and the ECTS, made it absolutely easier to go and study abroad… [T]he transition to the two-tier system was definitely beneficial for mobility. It was again another form or factor to help people to move and migrate smoothly between countries.
>
> (LG02 – Dean of Faculty, Public University; one of the first beneficiaries of Lithuanian government's scholarships to study abroad)

Moreover, to study the impact of general emigratory trends of these societies, I have investigated the overall emigration rate of Lithuania and Albania over the same period of time. Chart 5.4 (below) displays plummeting emigration trends for both countries. In other words, while fewer people are leaving the country, more students are going to study abroad. Therefore, migratory trends alone cannot explain the incremental outward mobility rates.

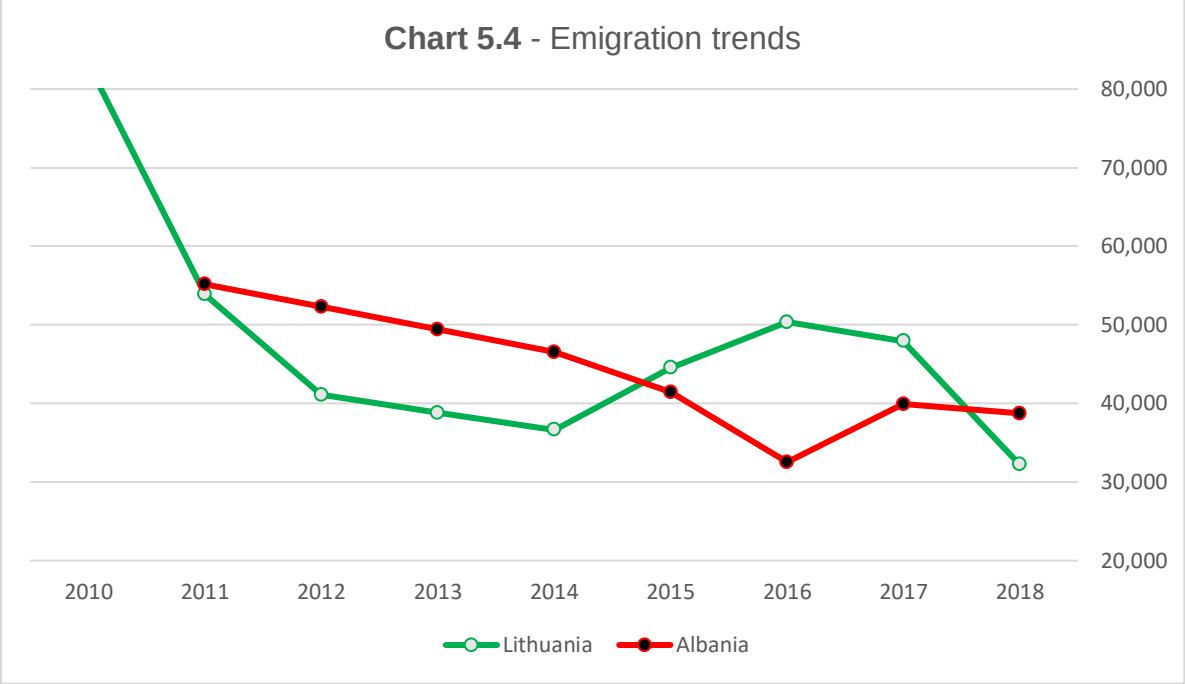


Chart 5.4 Emigration trends in absolute numbers over the last decade for Albania and Lithuania
sources: Statistics Lithuania, 2019; INSTAT, 2018

On the other hand, despite all their efforts and aspirations, the soaring outward mobility rates have not been met by higher inward mobility numbers, producing a constant negative net balance for both countries. In absolute numbers, Albania went from an average -7'959 annual net balance in the first decade of Bologna, to -23'055 in the second decade. During the same time, Lithuania went from -4'363 to -6'543 (see the full table of mobility rates in Appendix 4.2). Consequently, Bologna implementation reports place both Albania and Lithuania at the bottom of the list, since they have the smallest share of EHEA inward mobility rates, respectively 0.9% and 2% of all their domestic students (EACEA, 2018).

Although these rates are slightly higher than twenty years ago, a closer look shows that even this increase might not reflect higher attractiveness of their tertiary education system. For instance, more than half of all inbound students in Lithuania are from Belarus (UIS, 2016; EACEA, 2015; IOM, 2012;). Thus, if we subtract students from this country from the total of international students in Lithuania (see chart 5.5 below), we see that the inward mobility rates have been rather stable for more than a decade. However, even these numbers might not reflect higher attractiveness of the Lithuanian education system.

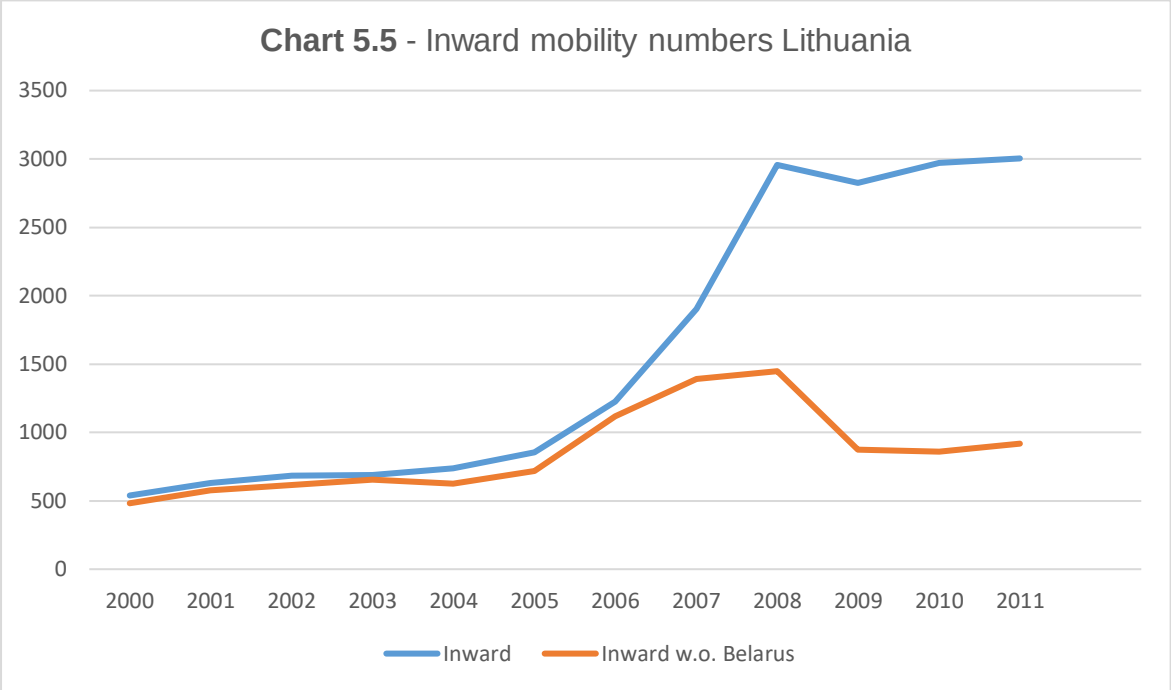


Chart. 5.5. Inward mobility numbers in Lithuania, with and without Belarusian students. **Source**: UIS, 2016

If we investigate these numbers further, we see that the majority of Belarusian students go to a private Belarusian HEI (IOM, 2012), which has moved to Vilnius in 2005, due to the political pressure back home (EHU, 2020). Thus, with 95% of its students and 82% of the academic staff from Belarus (ETER, 2019), it would be difficult to argue that this institution represents an increased international attractiveness of the Lithuanian higher education system.

In Albania, although inward mobility has declined, as a percentage of all domestic students, falling from 1.7% in 2000, to 1% in 2015 (INSTAT, 2019; EACEA, 2018; UIS, 2016), the number of inbound students is greater in 2015. According to Unesco's Institute of Statistics (2016), the number of mobile students in Albania increased to 1'431 from 677 it was in 2000.

However, looking closer at the country of origin of these students, we can see that, as in Lithuania, these numbers hardly reflect the level of attraction of the Albanian education system. For instance, the same source shows that 568 of these 'international' students are indeed ethnic Albanians living in neighbouring Kosovo, North Macedonia or Montenegro, with which Albania has dual agreements that offer them guaranteed quota in the public HEIs (DCM Nr. 423, 08.06.2011). Indeed, the Albanian State Police, Department for the border and emigration, which does not seem to count ethnic Albanians as foreign, reports a lower number of incoming international students: 842 in 2015 and 652 in 2016 (Si, 2020, August 22).

Moreover, a closer look at the composition of this group, reveals that most of them are students from Italy (529) and Turkey (308), who attend two foreign HEIs located in Albania but operating as extensions of their home education system (see chapter 4). As discussed further in chapter 6, these institutions, one Italian and another Turkish, employ staff from the country of origin (e.g. Italy or Turkey), and act as extraterritorial institutions incidentally located in Albania. For instance, the academic staff in the Italian university comes from Italy, teaching is delivered in Italian, diplomas are issued in collaboration with Italian partners. Moreover, this university targets mainly Italian students who have not managed to be enrolled in domestic institutions, while still planning to transfer their studies back to Italy at a later stage (AP07).

> In 2016 there were 706 real foreign students in Albania, and our university has received 530 [of them], who are mainly EU citizens, and primarily from Italy.
> (AP07, administrative executive of a private HEI in Albania)

In summary, removing barriers to mobility has not helped Albania and Lithuania to circulate students with the rest of the EHEA. Instead, they have continued to send more students to developed European countries, while receiving very few students from abroad, and therefore establish a one-directional corridor from the periphery towards the centre, which has further implications for their education system in particular and their society in general (see below).

> [T]his exchange is one-directional. It's not mobility, it's one direction mobility… I think people from developed countries don't understand this, or maybe they are happy with that because they receive talents.
> (LG03, President of the Lithuanian Rectors' Conference)

b. The national demand

As discussed in chapter 4, some authors argue that the prospect of emigration will increase the demand for tertiary education in the sending country (Beine et al., 2003). Moreover, unlike in many of the losing countries, in Lithuania tertiary education offers a very good job prospect to young people. Tertiary educated have an annual gross income 1.65 times higher, they are less likely to be unemployed (4% versus 23%) (EU Labour Force Survey, 2018), and have a much lower risk of poverty (4.2%), compared with less educated (59.3) (EACEA, 2018).

Still, contrary to these expectations, the demand for tertiary education in Lithuania and Albania has declined even further. Indeed, the prospect of emigration has encouraged even more students to choose education abroad, as a gateway to employment in the host country (OECD, 2016). For instance, the Lithuanian Government's Strategy Analytical Center (MOSTA) reports that 66% of students who plan to study abroad, rank a better job prospect in the host country as the main reason (Mosta, 2014).

> I would say that the economic situation in Lithuania is important here. People are very disappointed with the low salary, and I think there is some kind of [belief] that if you go to the universities…abroad, you can find a job there…
>
> (LG06, Student, representative of the LSS)

Similarly, 74% of young people in Albania rank better 'employment chances' as their top reason to emigrate (Cela & Kamberi, 2015). Moreover, their perception about the national education (section c, below) has persuaded many students to choose education abroad. For instance, most of the Albanian students (63%) believe that higher education at home does not prepare them for the labour market (Cela & Kamberi, 2019; SAIA, 2018, December), and only 6.5% believe that it prepares them for the international market (Eurostudent 2017).

Consequently, the domestic demand for tertiary education in Lithuania has plummeted over the past decade. As shown in chart 5.6 (below), tertiary education enrolments halved from 49'545 in 2000 to 21'519 in 2018. In this situation, even internationally renowned universities, like the University of Vilnius, often struggle to attract qualified students (Mitchell, 2015).

> Student enrolments are dropping by between 5% and 7% per year…The worst predictions are that the number of graduates will fall by 40% by 2023.
>
> (Kazlauskaite, Education Exchanges Support Foundation Lithuania, quoted in Mitchell, 2015)

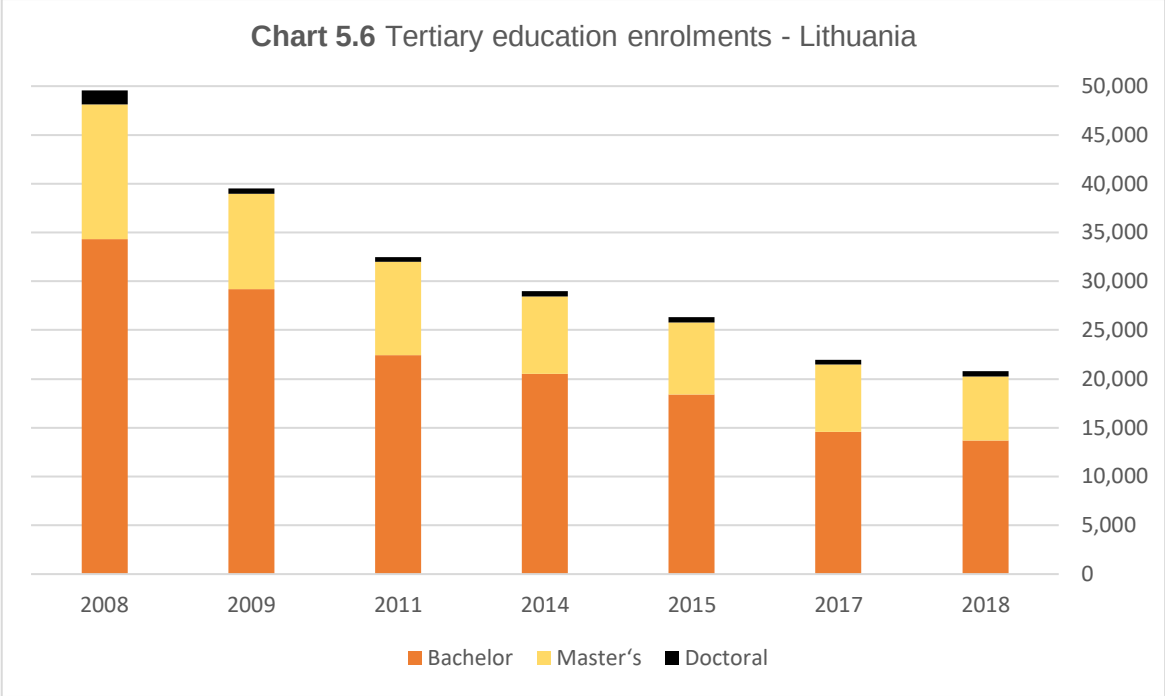


Chart 5.6 Tertiary education enrolments for all degrees and HEIs in Lithuania **Source**: Statistics Lithuania, 2020

The same situation is observed in Albania (chart 5.7, below), where the demand for tertiary education has steadily declined in recent years (Cela & Kamberi, 2019, 2015; Rrokaj, 2018). The statistical yearbook shows that between 2012 and 2014 tertiary education enrolment fell from 35'996 to 22'336 (MoE, 2016), which means that in only two years Albania lost 7.5% of its student population (EACEA, 2018).

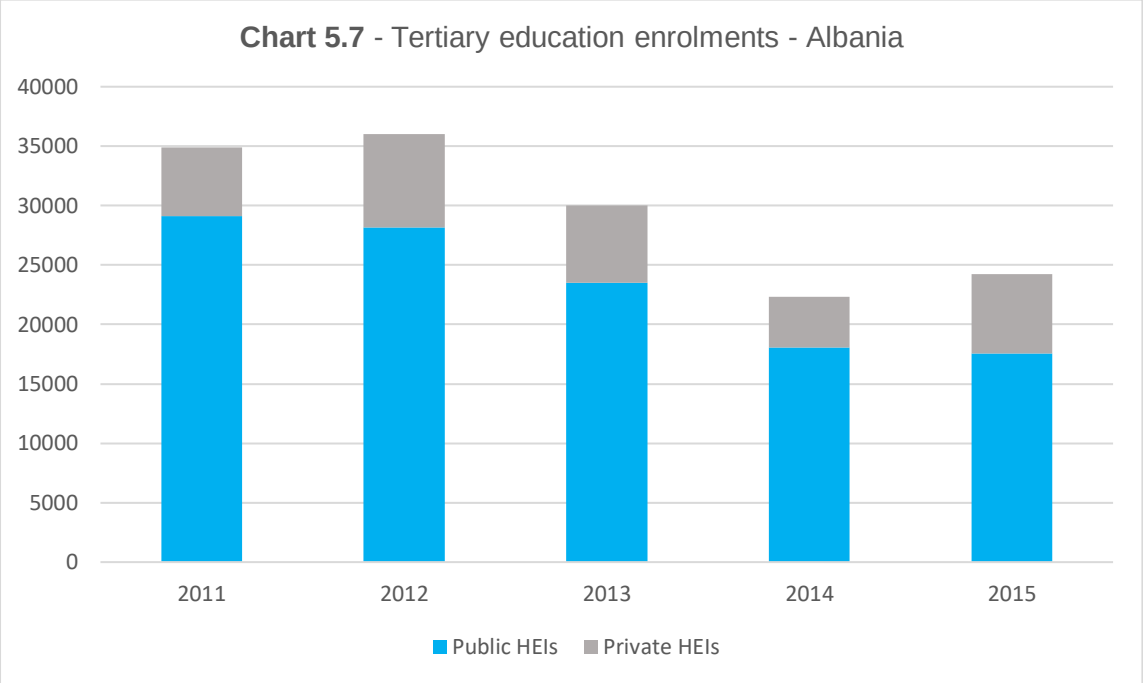


Chart 5.7 – Tertiary education enrolments for private and public HEIs, in Albania **Source**: MoE, 2016, 2018

This situation, which is far from what many actors expected twenty years ago, has faded the optimism that the policy elite used to have when they joined this cooperation. However, they have not given up on this policy agenda, and they still believe that they will win at some point, albeit not in the near future:

> We expect retainment of our own students and attraction of the students from other countries, especially from Eastern countries…Currently, both at the state level and the institutional level, we have a set of measures which are aiming at attracting people to Lithuania. Whether this will happen quickly, **I don't think so**.
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public University)

c. The education offer

Proponents of *brain circulation* argument, discussed in chapter 4, argue that as more students go abroad, they will bring back the necessary knowledge and expertise, which will help the sending country to develop (Tung, 2008; Saxenian, 2002). However, the evidence presented below shows that the loss of a high number of students has had ramifications for both countries, while not helping their higher education sector to develop.

Firstly, the decline in the number of students has led to many study programs having very low enrolment rates (Caturianas & Budraitis, 2019). To illustrate, in 2013 there were 10’312 empty seats (5’701 for undergraduate, and 4’611 for graduate), or 36% of all places, in the HEIs of Albania (MoE, 2018, August; MoE, 2016). Consequently, both governments have introduced a minimum enrolment rate threshold for publicly subsidised study programs. In Lithuania, the ministry reduced the number of study programs from 1800 to 700 (SMM, 2017, May 12; Jurcenkaite, 2017, July 19). In Albania, the lack of students has led to tens of study programs being closed against the will of the academic community (Qendresa, 2018). On the other hand, private HEIs have closed hundreds of programs voluntarily, due to low enrolment rates (Sarkana, 2018, June 26).

> Fewer students are coming to the higher education sector because of the demographics, [and because] of the emigration, [as] students choose to study in other countries…There is a number of universities, and, of course, **there are not enough** students for the universities and many programs are closing every year.
>
> (LG05, Head of the quality unit, International HEI, Lithuania)

Similarly, the decline in the tertiary education demand has contributed to the contraction of the education offer in both countries. Chart 5.8 (below) shows that the number of HEIs in Albania, both public and private, increased up to 20012, and then took a downturn in 2013 going below the number of HEIs in 2010. The same trend is observed in Lithuania: the number of HEIs initially increased and then reached a downturn in 2009 (Statistics Lithuania, 2019).

The demand for tertiary education and the number of institutions are linked, because lack of students has encouraged many HEIs to merge in order to economise their resources, cover fixed costs and stay afloat (Leisyte, 2018; Jegelevicius, 2017, May 5). Accordingly, 11 higher education institutions have already merged in Lithuania (Seimas, 2018, June 5; SMM, 2011), and more merges are expected to happen in the future (Caturianas & Budraitis, 2019).

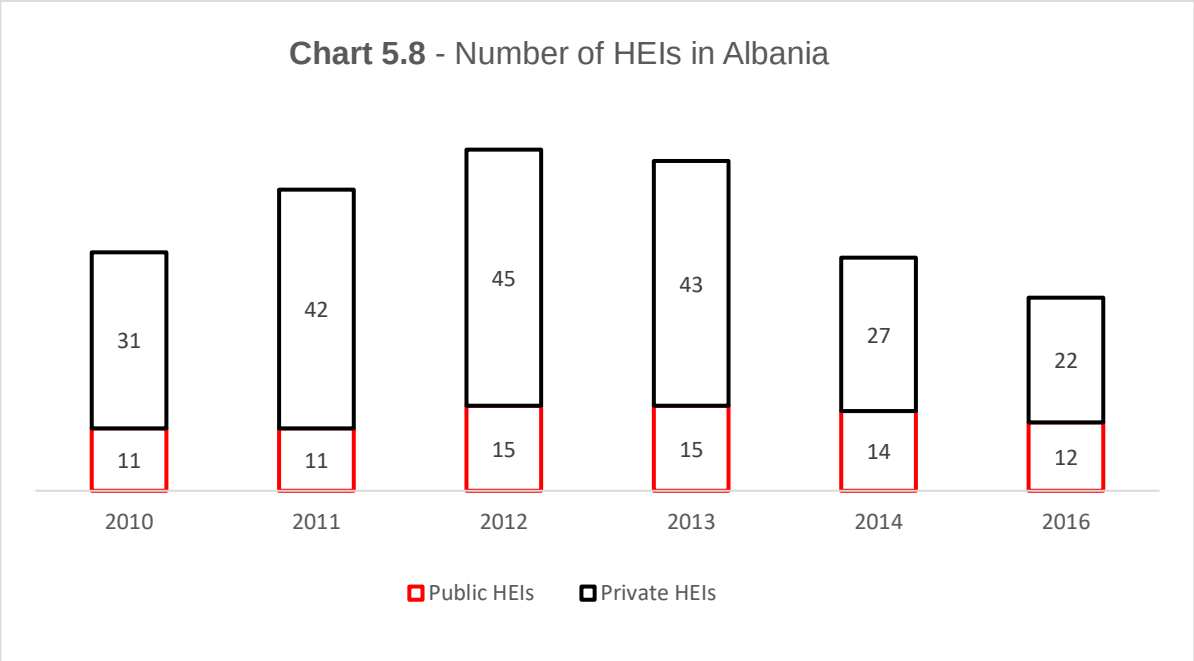


Chart 5.8 the number of public and private HEIs in Albania **source**: INSTAT, 2020, MASR, 2018

Secondly, higher outward student mobility has had an impact on student admission standards in both countries. As it is put in this influential publication of the World Bank, talented students are of paramount importance for an education system:

> The first and perhaps foremost determinant of excellence is the presence of a critical mass of top students and outstanding faculty. World-class universities can select the best students and attract the most qualified professors...
> (Salmi, 2009, p. 20)

However, selecting the best candidates becomes difficult when there are fewer applicants to choose from. As discussed above, Lithuania and Albania are not only losing students, but they

are also losing a high percentage of their best and brightest. As a working group of the Lithuanian Ministry noted, “many of the **highest quality students** and faculty were leaving the country to study and work abroad” (Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013, p.8, emphasis added).

> Yes, this fear [of losing students] is always, and very often it happens. And it happens now because foreign universities, including British ones, they are taking **our best students**... and many of them stay in other countries…
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, Signatory of the Bologna Declaration)

> Definitely, we are losing the compound of 50-60 per cent of **our best students** who would [have studied] here as Master or PhD students…
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public HEI, Lithuania)

On the other hand, public and private HEIs alike have strong financial incentives to retain their student population size, because they rely on tuition fees. Even public HEIs, albeit subsidised by the government, are funded based on their student numbers, through a scheme known as “money follows the student” (Eurydice, 2020, September). Academics too have an interest in student numbers, because closure of study programs makes their position redundant.

In this context, congruent to was discussed in chapter 4, HEIs in both countries have expanded the pool of potential applicants by becoming less selective and lowering their admission standards (Caturianas & Budraitis, 2019; AG32, email correspondence, 06.08.2020). To illustrate, while the number of university applications in Albania fell by 5%, between 2015 and 2017, the admission rate rose by 12%, from 75% to 87% (Rrokaj, 2018).

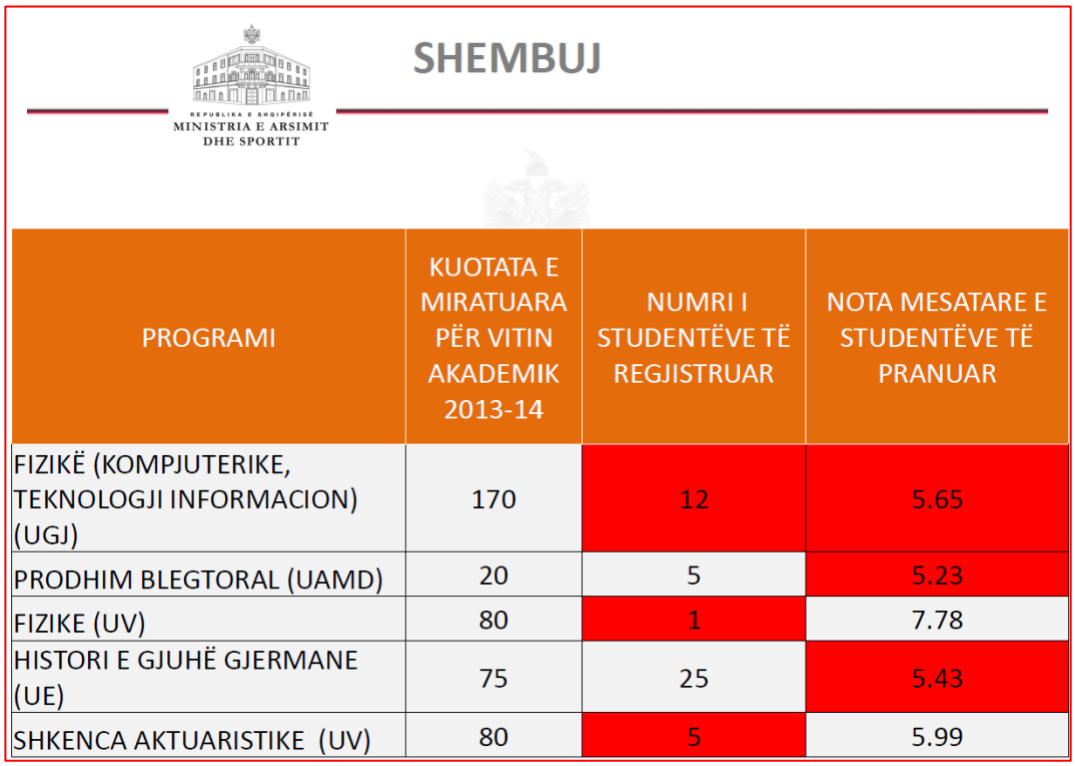
> Between 2007 and 2015 the minimum GPA to enrol in [our] university was 8.0 out 10.0, but [in 2015] we had to lower [it] to 7.0, and still [it] is higher than other universities, which until last year had a 6.0 [GPA threshold]…
> (AG30, admission office, international private HEI in Albania, email correspondence 11.08.2020)

> The situation is becoming worse, more students are leaving, and the admission standards in our universities are getting lower.
> (LG06, representative of the LSS)

Similarly, the pressure to become internationally attractive has encouraged several HEIs to apply lax admission standards for international candidates. To illustrate, entry requirements for international students in Vilnius University, the oldest in Lithuania, are a GPA of 2.5 (IB 27) and IELTS 5.5, and they are even lower for the IBC of New York University in Tirana (Gotouniversity.com, 2020; Ualbania, 2020). Furthermore, “[i]n some cases, universities

recognise diplomas [acquired abroad] **without assessment**", albeit verifying international qualifications is a legal obligation for them (IOM, 2012, p.31, emphasis added).

To address this tendency of universities to lower their admission standards, the Lithuanian Conference of Rectors proposed in 2015, the introduction of an entry threshold, which was still very low (Pukene, 2015). Two years later, the Lithuanian Ministry increased that threshold again (Eurydice, 2020, September). Almost at the same time, the Albanian government intervened by introducing an admission threshold in order to prevent HEIs from admitting students with very low academic attainments (DCM, 407, 01.06.2016). Thus, as illustrated in image 5.4 (below), the ministry has closed dozens of study programs, due to the very low average GPA of the students enrolled in the program (MoE, 2018, August).



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË
MINISTRIA E ARSIMIT DHE SPORTIT

SHEMBUJ

PROGRAMI	KUOTATA E MIRATUARA PËR VITIN AKADEMIK 2013-14	NUMRI I STUDENTËVE TË REGJISTRUAR	NOTA MESATARE E STUDENTËVE TË PRANUAR
FIZIKË (KOMPJUTERIKE, TEKNOLOGJI INFORMACION) (UGJ)	170	12	5.65
PRODHIM BLEGTORAL (UAMD)	20	5	5.23
FIZIKE (UV)	80	1	7.78
HISTORI E GJUHË GJERMANE (UE)	75	25	5.43
SHKENCA AKTUARISTIKE (UV)	80	5	5.99

Image nr 5.4: This is a facsimile of the Albanian Ministry of Education's report on study programs that are closed (red highlight) based on low levels of the GPA of enrolled students. **Source**; MoE, August 2018

Thirdly, the decline in the number of students has had a direct impact on the incomes of HEIs in both countries. As discussed in chapter 4, outbound students take with them the financial capital that could have been invested in the education system at home. For instance, Albanian students abroad spend on average 300 million Euros a year (Appendix 4.1), which is several times the entire budget of higher education in Albania (see Chart 5.11, below).

> Albanian society spends 250 million Euros on educating its children abroad. In other words,…25,000 students spending on average, ten grants a month for ten months, or more, it might go up to 300 million [Euros].
>
> (AG03, Member of Parliament, former president of the Rectors Conference of Albania)

To mitigate the impact of financial loss by the decreasing number of students, public HEIs have increased their tuition fees for those left behind. Charts 5.9 and 5.10 (below) illustrate that although public HEIs in Albania have increased tuition fees by 57% (DCM Nr.586, 2010; DCM Nr.638, 2015), their total income from tuition fees has dropped by 9% (Monitor, 2018, December 11). In other words, as fewer students are left behind, they have to pay higher tuition fees to substitute the financial loss of higher education institutions.

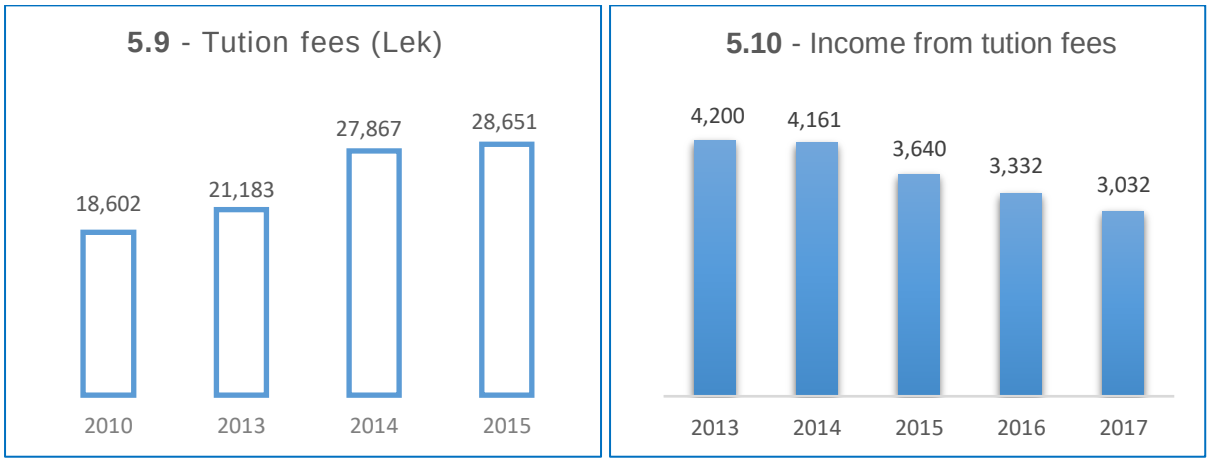


Chart 5.9 The average tuition fees for public HEIs in Albania (in ALL) **Source**: DCM Nr.586, 2010; Nr.638, 2015
Chart 5.10 The total income of public HEIs form tuition fees (x million) in Albanian Lek **Source**: MoF, 2019

Additionally, both governments have increased their subsidies for public HEIs, to make up for their declining incomes. Chart 5.11 (below) and chart 5.1 (above) illustrate this argument, by showing that both governments have more than doubled the budget for higher education (Albanian Ministry of Finance [MoF], 2019; Statistics Lithuania, 2019).

Private universities, on the other hand, which rely mainly on tuition fees, have faced higher competition for ever-shrinking market size in both countries. Consequently, most of them have lowered their tuition fees as a strategy to make their services available to a larger population of clients. Interviews, with administrators of private HEIs (AG31; AG32), confirm that this decision was dictated by the falling demand for tertiary education, especially from the middle-class families, which tend to educate their children abroad (see King & Gedeshi, 2020).

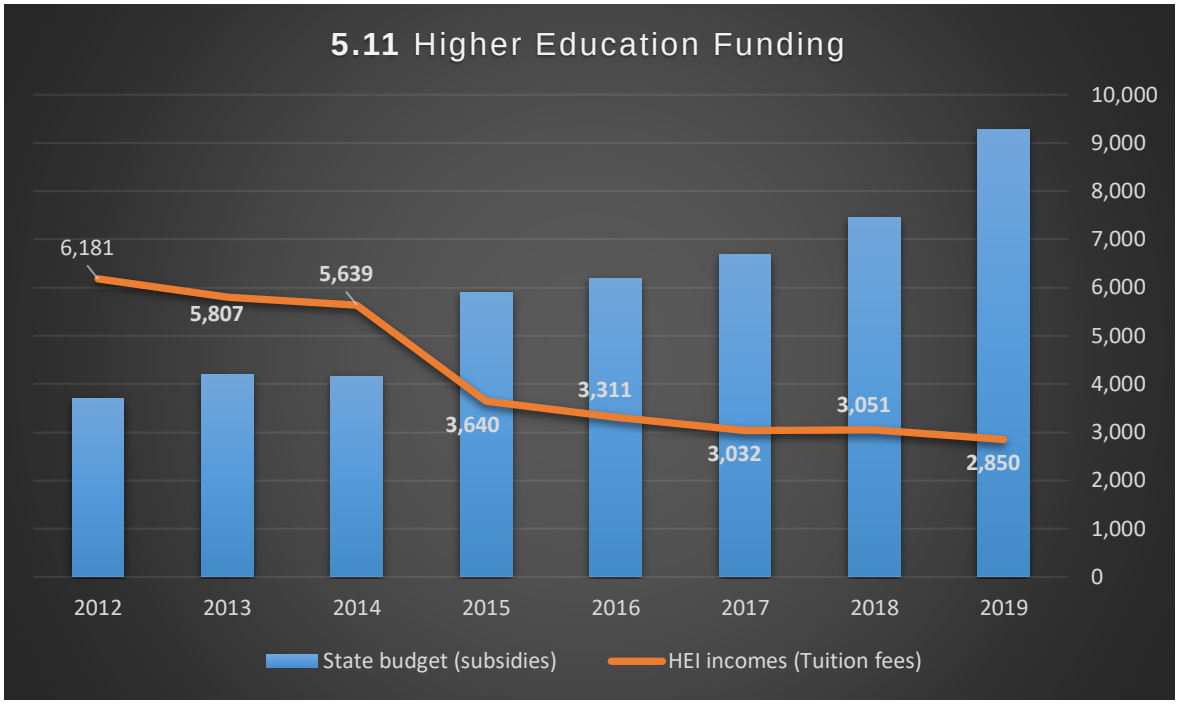


Chart 5.11 State budget for HEIs in Albania and their incomes from tuition fees (x million) in Albanian Lek (ALL) **Source**: MoF, 2019; Monitor, 2018, December 11

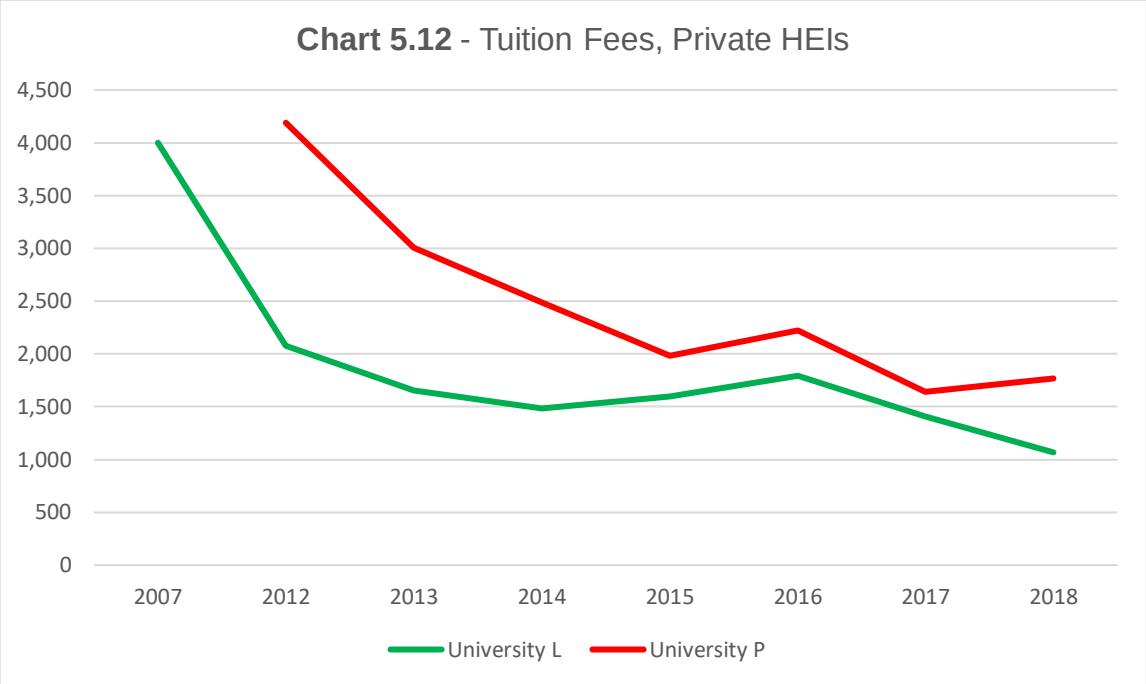
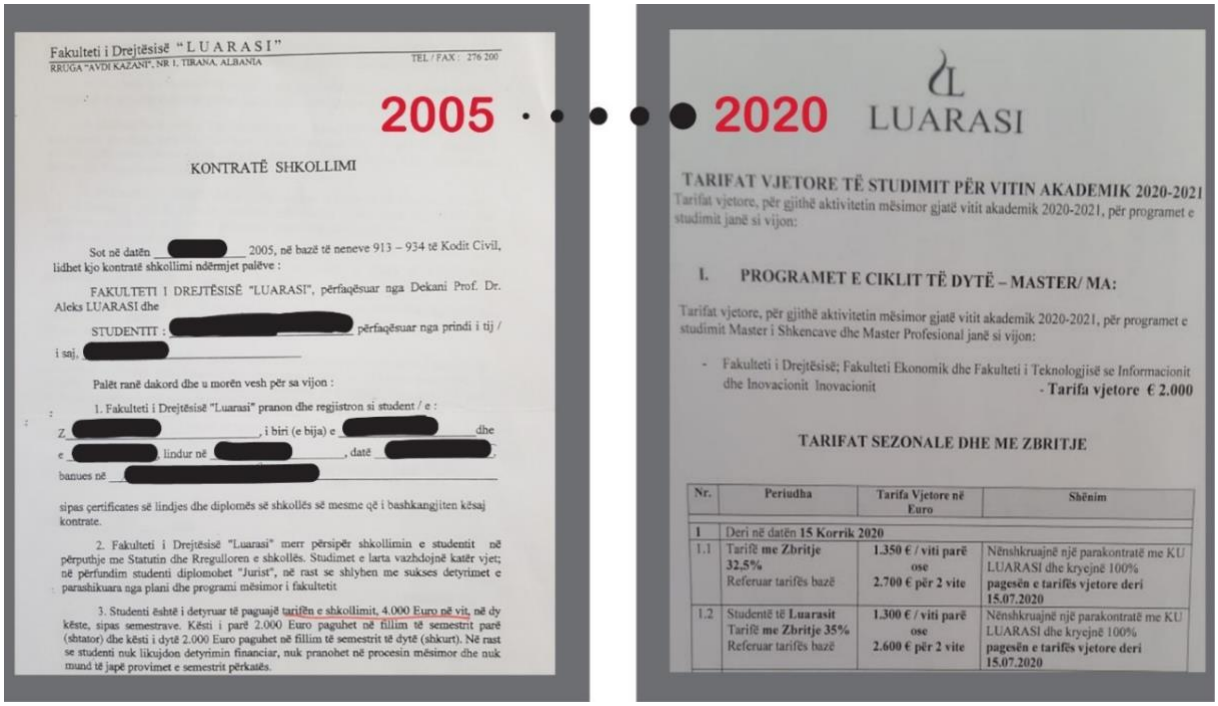


Chart 5.12: The average annual tuition fee (EUR) is calculated by dividing the total annual income from tuition fees with the number of students of a given HEI in a given year **Source**: QKB, 2020; INSTAT, 2020

Chart 5.12 (above) illustrates this argument by showing how the oldest private HEIs in Albania have significantly decreased their tuition fees over the past decade. Another example is given in images 5.5 (below), where it is shown how one of the oldest private HEIs in Albania is charging students only a-third of the tuition fees that it applied 15 years ago.



Fakulteti i Drejtësisë "LUARASI"
RRUGA "AVDI KAZANI", NR. 1, TIRANA, ALBANIA TEL / FAX : 276 200

2005

KONTRATË SHKOLLIMI

Sot në datën [redacted] 2005, në bazë të neneve 913 – 934 të Kodit Civil, lidhet kjo kontratë shkollimi ndërmjet palëve :

FAKULTETI I DREJTËSISË "LUARASI", përfaqësuar nga Dekani Prof. Dr. Aleks LUARASI dhe

STUDENTIT : [redacted] përfaqësuar nga prindi i tij / i saj, [redacted]

Palët ranë dakord dhe u morën vesh për sa vijon :

1. Fakulteti i Drejtësisë "Luarasi" pranon dhe regjistron si student / e : Z. [redacted], i biri (e bija) e [redacted] dhe e [redacted], lindur në [redacted], datë [redacted], banues në [redacted]

sipas certificates së lindjes dhe diplomës së shkollës së mesme që i bashkangjiten kësaj kontrate.

2. Fakulteti i Drejtësisë "Luarasi" merr përsipër shkollimin e studentit në përputhje me Statutin dhe Rregulloren e shkollës. Studimet e larta vazhdojnë katër vjet; në përfundim studenti diplomohet "Jurist", në rast se shlyhen me sukses detyrimet e parashikuara nga plani dhe programi mësimor i fakultetit

3. Studenti është i detyruar të paguajë tarifën e shkollimit, 4.000 Euro në vit, në dy këste, sipas semestrave. Kësti i parë 2.000 Euro paguhet në fillim të semestrit parë (shtator) dhe kësti i dytë 2.000 Euro paguhet në fillim të semestrit të dytë (shkurt). Në rast se studenti nuk likujdon detyrimin financiar, nuk pranohet në procesin mësimor dhe nuk mund të japë provimet e semestrit përkatës.

2020

LUARASI

TARIFAT VJETORE TË STUDIMIT PËR VITIN AKADEMIK 2020-2021

Tarifat vjetore, për gjithë aktivitetin mësimor gjatë vitit akademik 2020-2021, për programet e studimit janë si vijon:

I. PROGRAMET E CIKLIT TË DYTË – MASTER/ MA:

Tarifat vjetore, për gjithë aktivitetin mësimor gjatë vitit akademik 2020-2021, për programet e studimit Master i Shkencave dhe Master Profesional janë si vijon:

- Fakulteti i Drejtësisë; Fakulteti Ekonomik dhe Fakulteti i Teknologjisë se Informacionit dhe Inovacionit Inovacionit - **Tarifa vjetore € 2.000**

TARIFAT SEZONALE DHE ME ZBRITJE

Nr.	Periudha	Tarifa Vjetore në Euro	Shënim
1	Deri në datën **15 Korrik 2020**		
1.1	Tarifë **me Zbritje 32,5%** Referuar tarifës bazë	**1.350 € / viti parë ose 2.700 € për 2 vite**	Nënshkruajnë një parakontratë me KU LUARASI dhe kryejnë 100% **pagesën e tarifës vjetore deri 15.07.2020**
1.2	Studentë të **Luarasit** Tarifë **me Zbritje 35%** Referuar tarifës bazë	**1.300 € / viti parë ose 2.600 € për 2 vite**	Nënshkruajnë një parakontratë me KU LUARASI dhe kryejnë 100% **pagesën e tarifës vjetore deri 15.07.2020**

Images 5.5: On the left is a contract signed in 2005 between a student and the HEI. On the right, is a flier distributed by the same HEI in 2020 where the tuition fee is officially advertised half of what it used to be 15 years ago, and there are further discounts (up to 30% off) applied to "early birds".

While leaders of private HEIs see low tuition fees as a strategy to win the national competition for domestic students, the policy elite is persuaded that their 'cheap' education services are a comparative advantage to increase their international attractiveness.

> **Question**: *Why do you think international students come to study here?*
>
> I think because in Lithuania it is relatively cheaper. Our prices for the conditions of studies is cheaper.
>
> (LP03, Lithuanian Minister)

> **Question**: *Why do you think international students come to study here?*
>
> Since they know that we have quite a lot of double degree programs, so they expect the quality for a cheaper price.
>
> (LG05, Head of the quality unit in a private HEI, Lithuania)

Nevertheless, lowering tuition fees hardly presents a real comparative advantage at the international level. As Musselin (2009) argues, the academic 'market' is driven by the 'economy of quality', meaning that the driving force is quality, not the price:

> Prices are central and the principal drivers of competition, as competitors engage in a price war. Competition creates a market as prices shape the competition: for a given product, the winner will be the competitor offering the lower price. This can only work if, as posited in neoclassical economic analysis, all products are the same. However, **this is rarely the case for research universities**.
>
> (Musselin, 2018, p.665, emphasis added)

Congruently, the OECD (2016) has found that international students choose universities based on the quality of studies and reputation (i.e. ranking in league tables), for they perceive their education as an investment. Surveys conducted with international students show that the majority of mobile students (88%) choose the quality of education as the main reason for studying abroad, whilst costs are mentioned by a mere 2% (Han et al., 2015). Similarly, asked to list the main factors that have made them study in Lithuania, international students rank "costs of living in the country" in the 7th place (IOM, 2012).

If anything, tuition fees in Albania and Lithuania are by no means cheap, when compared to many other developed European countries. According to the index of the education portal Study.eu (2018), Lithuania ranks below Germany for the affordability of studies. Indeed, annual tuition fees in Lithuanian HE vary from 1'360 to 2'160 Euro (EC, 2020b), but they can be as high as 8'300 Euro (IOM, 2012). Similarly, in Albania tuition fees vary between 1'400 and 3'510 Euros (Doko, 2018, April 13; DCM Nr.638, 2015). These are often more expensive than tuition fees of HEIs in developed countries (see Appendix 4.1). Thus, if study costs were the determining factor of studying abroad, it is unclear why internationally mobile students would choose Lithuania or Albania over countries like Germany, Italy, France and Denmark.

Having said that, it is true that tuition fees in Albania and Lithuania are much cheaper than in the UK, which is a top study destination for Albanian students (Cela & Kamberi, 2019, 2015), and attracts almost half of all Lithuanian students abroad (EACEA, 2015). However, even in that case, these countries lose more than they gain, because replacing outbound students to the UK, with inbound international students, drives away higher financial capital than it brings to the country. To illustrate, in 2011, 3'881 Lithuanian students were studying in the UK, and 16 British students studying in Lithuania (UIS, 2016). Referring to the average tuition fees and living costs for the EU students (Appendix 4.1), Lithuanian families spent approximately 22'850

Euros per student, or 88.7 million Euros in total to educate their students in the UK. British families, on the other hand, spent on average 8'581 Euros per student, or 137 thousand Euros in total for all British students studying in Lithuania. The end result is a staggering 88.5 million Euros being transferred from families in Lithuania to fund the British education system.

Fourthly, the quality of higher education at home is impacted when the sheer amount of financial capital is invested abroad, while the incomes of domestic HEIs fall. It was established in chapter 4 that financial resources are *the sine qua non* of excellence in higher education (Salmi, 2009). Thus, less financial resources mean limited capacities for HEIs in Albania and Lithuania to attract and retain outstanding academics and researchers (AG03; AG21). Like most of the losers, Lithuania lags behind most of other EU countries in remuneration of academics (Mosta, 2016). On average, they are paid four times less in Lithuania than their colleagues in neighbouring Sweden (see chart 4.9 in chapter 4), respectively 13'851 to 56'053 Euros (EC, 2007). Academics in Albania are paid even less, with annual wages averaging at less than 9'600 EUR (i.e. 1'155'000 ALL) (DCM 329. 12.04.2017; DCM 748, 11.06.2009; see for example, 'Fan Noli' University, nr.330 24.06.2019). Consequently, as the academic career is less attractive in Lithuania and Albania than it is in the winning countries, these countries cannot "afford" to compete internationally for talented academics:

> Definitely, this is a race, and you cannot put your money on **a poor horse** on a race. You need to look for some leaders, and you put money on those. No one puts money on the losing horse in a race...
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public HEI, Lithuania)

Thus, less than 1% of all academics in Lithuania are international, and this number decreased further, going to 148 in 2015 (ETER, 2019). Moreover, these academics are concentrated in only two private HEIs, one of which has employed 86 % (128) of them (*ibid*).

> [Our students leave] because of the international ranking. What we [as a university] lack is an international environment, lack of international teachers, we cannot attract and employ them, because of the salaries…University teachers are paid very little, for instance, a professor has the salary of a taxi driver.
>
> (LG03, President of Lithuanian Rectors' Conference)

> The government is trying to [provide] help for people who are coming back. But, again, the difference in the salary level prevents [them]... So, people don't even come. For example, if we want to hire a professor, we cannot compare the salary level, although we try to have much higher salaries than public universities…
>
> (LG05, Head of the quality unit, Private HEI, Lithuania)

Unable to attract academics from abroad, many HEIs in Lithuania have encouraged their native staff to deliver courses in an international language, in a bid to improve their attractiveness to international students. Consequently, the number of students studying in English slightly increased from 2 % in 2001 to 2.2 % in 2003 (SMM, 2003). However, often the lack of appropriate language skills among the faculty members turns into an obstacle for the quality of teaching and learning, increasing students' dissatisfaction with the course and giving the opposite effect (Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013).

> About the university, I am not really satisfied, because the English level [of the teachers] is not that high. Sometimes, it even becomes a challenge to understand what they are saying because they cannot even pronounce the words correctly… They are not so sophisticated as I was expecting…[They don't get the best teachers here] because of the salaries, I believe. And those who are able to teach well and have the knowledge are leaving the country.
>
> (LG09, international student, Lithuania)

Fifthly, due to the reduced incomes and the closure of HEIs and study programs, the number of academics in both countries plummeted in recent years (UN Statistics, 2020). To illustrate, between 2010 and 2016, while the number of academics rose by 44.5% in Germany and 57.4% in the UK, it fell by 9.7% in Lithuania (EACEA, 2018). Accordingly, Chart Nr.5.13 (below), shows that in the last decade Lithuania lost 32% of its academics, going from 14'686 academics in 2006, to around 10'000 a decade later (Statistics Lithuania, 2020).

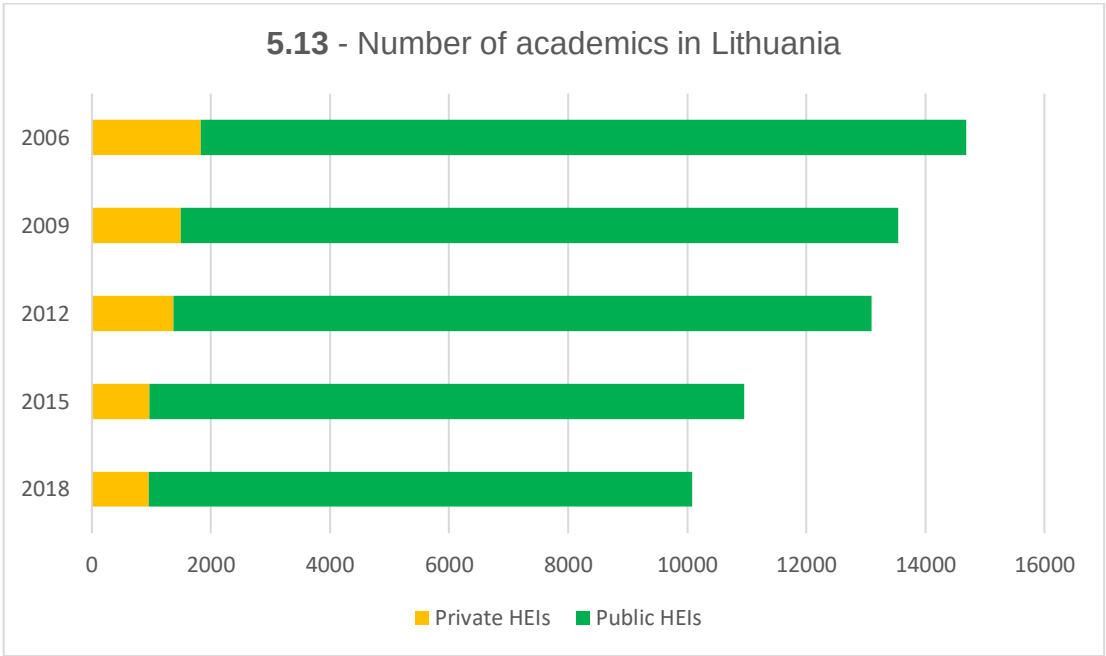


Chart 5.13 The number of academics working in public and private HEIs in Lithuania **Source**: Statistics Lithuania

Similarly, Albania lost 18% of its academic community in two years, falling to 9'025 academics in 2015 from 11'062 it had in 2013 (MoE, 30.09.2020). This decline is particularly observed in private HEIs, which collectively have lost more than 40% of their academic staff between 2011 and 2016, dropping from 4'402 to 2'591 academics (MASR, 2018, 'Statistical yearbook').

> Desertion of our universities from students will be followed by a massive exodus of young researchers and lecturers…who will seek employment abroad..
> (Tafaj, former Albanian minister, 2019, May 16)

Finally, as a corollary of what was discussed above, it becomes challenging for the higher education sector in Lithuania and Albania to maintain high-quality standards in terms of teaching and research output. Consequently, several HEIs in both countries have had their licences removed based on quality assurance reports (Vainorius, 2018, March 7; Erebara, 2014, August 07; Hazizolli, 2014, August 05; Gjonca, 2014, April). Consequently, that is another indirect link between the demand for tertiary education and the total number of institutions, although not a very far-fetched one.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 5.2 (below) both countries score very low in the Global Innovation Index, and they are ranking even lower than before, which indicates that their HEIs are not getting any better in terms of research output and innovation (WIPO, 2011; 2019).

Table 5.2 - Global Innovation Index, the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)

	Overall Ranking		Ranking on Human Capital & Research		Education score		Research and development score	
	2010	**2018**	**2010**	**2018**	**2010**	**2018**	**2010**	**2018**
Lithuania	39	40	34	47	67.7	51.7	33.4	18.9
Albania	81	83	82	88	49.8	40.1	24.4	1.2

Source: WIPO, 2011; 2019

Congruently, Albanian and Lithuanian students are very critical about the quality of education at home (EACEA, 2018). For instance, the majority of Lithuanian students (54%) declare that *studies are easier* (less challenging) in Lithuania than abroad (Mosta, 2014). Similarly, 68% of Lithuanian students who participated in exchange programs, believe that the quality of education abroad is much higher than in Lithuania (ibid). The same level of dissatisfaction with higher education at home is observed at Albanian students (Cela & Kamberi, 2019; IDRA,

2013). For instance, a survey of the Supreme Audit Institution of Albania (SAIA, 2018, December) found that only one in four students is happy with the quality of domestic HEIs. Inevitably, neither of both countries has managed to improve the reputation of their education system and therefore appear to the international league tables (chapter 4). Moreover, low reputation and the contraction of their education sector might harm the chances of Albania and Lithuania to improve their situation in the future, as discussed in the following section.

d. Perpetuum mobile

It was established above that both countries are sending more students abroad than they are attracting. However, as discussed in chapter 4, proponents of the "brain circulation" argument, argue that sending countries benefit when outbound students return upon graduation while having acquired better knowledge and skills abroad:

> [It should] be stressed that brain circulation is a vital process, which fosters countries competitiveness as well as world's economic growth in knowledge-based economy…In the future brain circulation phenomenon will manifest with the greater power. Countries must put all the efforts while stimulating this process because this is the key to countries development and competitiveness as well.
>
> (Daugeliene & Marcinkeviciene, 2009, pp.51-52)

To that end, governments of Lithuania and Albania have made several efforts to attract back their graduates (i.e. brain gain). To illustrate, when the country joined Bologna in 1999, the Lithuanian president, in his annual address to the nation, emphasised the pressing need to "search for the ways to attract to [its] universities young scientists educated abroad" (Adamkus, 1999). In that vein, the government has taken several steps to encourage Lithuanians educated abroad to return, through conditional scholarships, fellowships, or favourable job offers (Daugeliene & Marcinkeviciene, 2009). For instance, Invest Lithuania, a governmental agency, has implemented several 'brain gain' programs (e.g. "Talents for Lithuania", and "Create Lithuania"), targeting successful Lithuanian expatriates (Create Lithuania, 2020). Similarly, the Albanian government initiated a well-funded 'Brain gain' project to attract back Albanian students who graduated abroad (UNDP in Albania, 2012; Ruci, 02.09.2009).

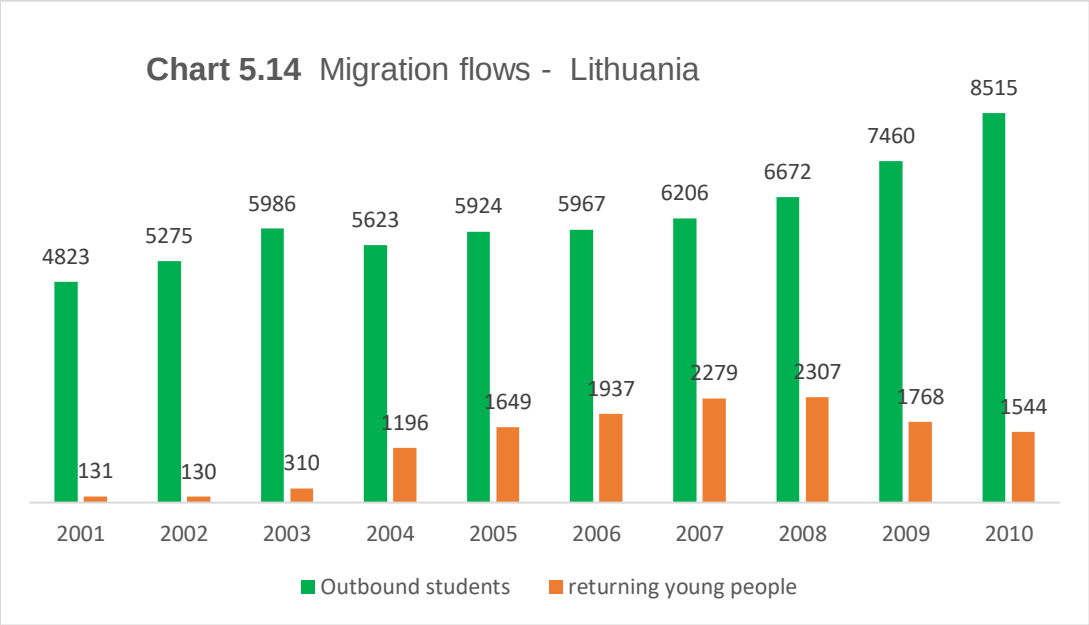
> Our universities over these years have experienced major problems. The biggest of them has been the 'brain drain'. We have decided to reverse the 'brain drain'… by undertaking an effective program, which aims to bring back all Albanian excellences and celebrities, temporarily or permanently, from wherever they are.
>
> (Berisha, then Prime Minister of Albania, 2005, November 23, p.2)

Nevertheless, notwithstanding all the efforts of both governments, these programs have had a minimal impact, with a negligible return rate. For instance, evidence suggests that fore more than a decade no more than 73 people in Albania, and 185 in Lithuania, have been able to benefit from these programs, more than 20% of whom have left the country again (Albanian government, 27.03.2009; Create Lithuania, 2020; interview with LG08).

> We had a program for the brain gain, which I have led myself. And it has been an exciting experience... **The interest of these young people to return to Albania has been extremely minimal**. Very minimal...
>
> (AP06, Albanian Minister)

> [Before 2000 we had some] programs for undergraduate students to go outside the country, obtain a degree and come back. But to my best knowledge, those programs were terminated as they were inefficient because most of the fellows did not come back and stayed in the [host] countries or [went] elsewhere.
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public University, one of the first beneficiaries of scholarships to study abroad)

In light of what is discussed in chapter 4, the efforts of the governments to reverse migration rates for highly skilled migrants are very unlikely to be successful for three main reasons. *Firstly*, because the desire of young Albania and Lithuanian students to return to their home country upon graduation is low. For instance, in a survey with Albanian students abroad, King & Gedeshi (2020), have found that only 5.4% of respondents, plan to return to their home



Graph Nr. 5.14 The number of Lithuanian students leaving every year vs the number of returning young expatriates (25 to 34-year-old). **Source**: Lithuanian Statistics, 2020

country, upon graduation. Other surveys with Albanian students who plan to study abroad have found that 63% of them plan to emigrate for a long period of time (Cela & Kamberi, 2019). Similarly, graph 5.14 (above) shows that while the outbound number of Lithuanian students has risen over the years, the return rate among young people remains much lower.

Secondly, both countries lack the means to compete internationally for talented graduates. As discussed in chapter 4, the prospect of better employability is among the top reasons why Lithuanian and Albanian students study abroad (King and Gedeshi, 2020; Cela dhe Kamberi, 2019; Repeckiene et al., 2016), but it is unlikely to find that better job prospect in their home country. To illustrate, in the 2014th Global Competitiveness Report, Lithuania is ranked as the worst OECD country, in terms of attracting and retaining talent (WEF, 2014).

> [Lithuanian students study abroad because] they want to finish good universities, to have diplomas and good jobs. Lithuania somehow cannot create good career opportunities for those people to come here. To return back.
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

Moreover, national surveys (Žiliukas et al., 2010) and comparative cross-country studies (Rodrigues, 2013) have consistently shown that unlike many other countries, international degrees do not constitute an advantage in the Lithuanian job market. In some cases, it can even be a disadvantage, because expectations of candidates educated abroad might not be met by companies that operate at the national level. These candidates might become "unaffordable" in terms of remuneration, or "unfit" in terms of their expectations from the employer, which includes a low power distance (Hofstede, 2001):

> From what I get to understand from the market and these conversations and discussions, especially the local companies - not the big multinational ones - they are a bit afraid of people who are coming back with international experience, especially the professional ones…Because they think that it is wasteful as **they would have to pay a big salary,** and understanding those employees' culture of the company is supposed to be different….
>
> (LG08, Project manager, Invest Lithuania)

On the other hand, some actors suggest that several foreign companies look for the cheap labour force in Lithuania, while importing the managerial staff from somewhere else (interview with LG01, LG08). In these cases, FDIs do not offer a better alternative, because returnees with prestigious international degrees are unlikely to opt-in for such job positions:

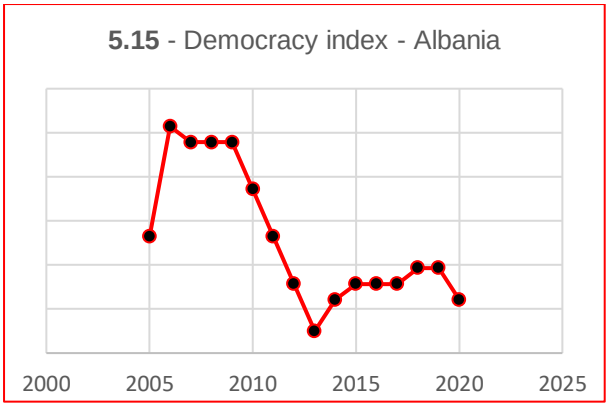
> **Question:** *Do international companies look for engineers educated abroad?*
>
> No. It doesn't matter [to them]. Usually part of their team is already coming from abroad…[However], there is a demand for people knowing languages and cultures, but it is not prerequisite… Multinational ones are very... multinational, talking about human resources. […] They bring people from abroad…It happens quite commonly, even though not always.
>
> (LG01, Expert, Public Employment Service)

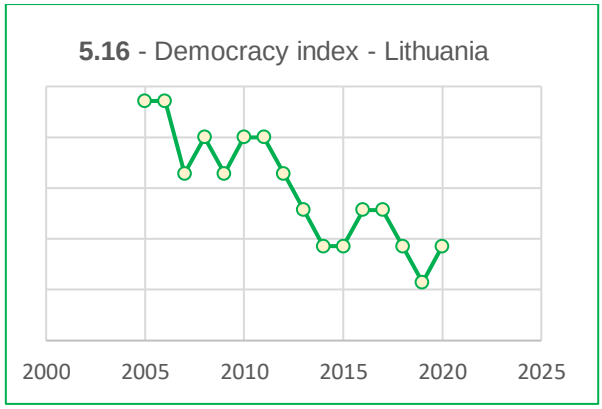
Thus, when Albanian and Lithuanian outbound students ponder their alternatives, they have many reasons, in terms of job prospect, to remain in the host country upon graduation. However, if they decide to return, they will likely find an environment that is hardly welcoming to talented graduates. As discussed in chapters 4 and 6, these countries suffer nepotism and lack of meritocracy in recruitments (Shqip, 2014, March 28; Marimon, et al., 2009; Dustmann, 1996; Knerr 1994). Accordingly, many of my research participants suggested that employment in academia is influenced by personal ties and social contacts (interviews with AG06; AG17; LG05; LG12; LP02). Consequently, returnees face additional obstacles, for when they go abroad, they often lose the social capital, which is necessary to navigate the system. For instance, when asked on why they do not study abroad, a considerable number of Lithuanian students (27%) express concern that doing so would cost them their job (Mosta, 2014).

> Lithuania is still a small country and... how to say… many people know each other and help each other to find jobs. So, if somebody is coming from abroad even with good education, everybody has their neighbour. “Who is this guy? Of course, his diploma is very good, but do you know him?”
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister)

> It's very difficult [to get a teaching position]. I think there is a lot of, you know, protectionism from the current faculty. For example, I came back from Italy, and I decided I wanted to be a teacher [after my] PhD. And I went to my faculty of economics, and I realised that there are the same people. Ten years later, and they're still running the faculty.
>
> (LG01, Expert, Public Employment Service, Lithuania)

Finally, as illustrated by charts 5.15 and 5.16 (below), both countries have backtracked in their path towards democracy. On the one hand, this process might be the outcome of high outward mobility rates, because, as discussed in chapter 4, the majority of those who emigrate towards Western Democracies, tend to have liberal views and to appreciate living in a democracy (Krasnev & Holmes, 2020; Collier, 2013). On the other hand, becoming less democratic makes these countries less attractive to live and work, and therefore their graduates have additional reasons to remain in the host country upon graduation.





Charts: 5.16 and 5.17, Nations in Transit, Democracy Index **Source**: Freedom House

In sum, the context in both countries has entered a self-reproducing cycle, where the negative net balance of student mobility produces even more reasons to study abroad. Firstly, the low reputation of HEIs not only discourages inbound international students, but it also drives more domestic students abroad. To illustrate, the majority (54%) of Lithuanian students who plan to study abroad, rank the higher quality of education as the main reason behind their decision to leave the country (Mosta, 2014). Secondly, the contraction of the education sector provides students (domestic and international alike) with a narrower study offer. In other words, international students have fewer incentives to come, while domestic students have more reasons to leave. Again, according to national surveys (Mosta, 2014), one in four Lithuanian students (24%) that plan to go abroad, do so because they do not find their preferred study programs in Lithuania. Thirdly, even when students graduated abroad want to return and contribute to the improvement of the education sector back home, they face additional obstacles which discourage them from returning. Finally, both countries are taking steps back in terms of democratic government, which encourages more students to leave, and discourages outbound students from returning home upon graduation.

To conclude, this process, which started with high hopes and optimism has not delivered for countries like Lithuania and Albania. The discourse about the efficiency of this policy agenda to transform education systems and help countries progress has resulted empty in terms of results for those who are on the losing end. Twenty years later, the optimism of early days, is replaced by the stark reality of being on the losing end of this cooperation. Many actors see that the light that enticed them to the other side remains far away, still on the other side.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I focus on the political, economic and historical context of the Bologna losers, striving to shed light on their loyalty. I take a historical account of the decision to join this cooperation, discussing the driving forces that have led these countries towards the Bologna's path. I discuss the identity formation process and the role of Europe as a collective memory of the societies of the periphery. I argue that when the previous regime reached a breaking point, and its ideology could no longer provide adequate answers, people in both countries started to rethink their identity and seek for a legitimate model to follow, which was Western Europe. I showed that a general drive to wipe out the political legacy of the previous regime, and the aspiration to embrace a new European identity led policy elites to undertake a series of political reforms, including reforms in higher education. Congruently, Bologna is understood as part of the Europeanisation process, and its implementation is motivated by the aspiration of building a 'modern state' and 'becoming like the rest of Europe'.

From that perspective, the losers' behaviour is explained through the logic of appropriateness, for they adjust their behaviour to what they perceive as appropriate to their new identity and the role that they have taken in this international cooperation. This shared understanding among policy elites is also manufactured through a set of soft governing tools, including socialisation. Moreover, a common frame of reference is used to shape the actors understanding of problems and to promulgate a set of policy solutions, which are presented as decontextualised and universally efficient.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the steps that both countries have taken to improve the quality of their higher education system and make it attractive to international students. I argue that following the policy agenda of Bologna diligently has not helped them to achieve these expectations. Indeed, they have become worse off, having an even worse negative net balance of student mobility, falling domestic demand for tertiary education, and less financial resources to attract outstanding academic staff or to fund research. I conclude my analysis by discussing the self-reproducing cycle of migration, which harms the chances of both countries to improve the quality of their higher education system in the future.

In this chapter, I addressed my first research question by showing that the losers joined Bologna hoping to improve the quality of their higher education sector, but contrary to their expectations, they became worse off. In the next chapter, I address the second research question, by discussing what motivates them to remain loyal to this cooperation, even when it has become apparent that it is not working to their national advantage.

Chapter 6 – Love is a losing game

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> What is essential goes without saying, because it comes without saying.
> (Bourdieu, 1977, p.167)

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the Europeanisation process has been a powerful force in shaping the preferences of the policy elite in Albania and Lithuania towards the policy agenda of the Bologna process (henceforth Bologna), even when this process does not represent their interests. I also provided evidence to show that actors' expectations are not met, and that the losers are still losing after two decades of Bologna reforms.

To answer why the losers remain in this cooperation, in this chapter, I take a closer look at the policy elite and the power structures operating at the national level. I identify the key players in the education policy domain and discuss how they are organised to influence policy-making (see Chart 6.1, below). Their actions and preferences are discussed through the lens of political cultural approaches because I argue that what is termed 'value stability' shapes the rules of appropriate behaviour of these elites (see Whitefield, 2005; Almond, 2000). Furthermore, I discuss the 'cognitive consensus' that dominates the discourse around Bologna, which is underpinned by a shared understanding among the policy elite, and discuss the mental maps through which information is filtered out to produce positive feedback, even when this policy is not delivering the expected results. I then explain why this *common sense* goes unchallenged, by focusing on what happens in the discussion space where policy actors meet, and the social costs of voicing discontent. I then bring these points together to review actors' preferences towards Bologna, discussing how they are socially constructed and how specific identities and roles help them navigate conflicting interests and responsibilities.

I want to remind the reader that, in bringing this evidence together and offering this interpretation of it, I have triangulated sources and used methodological triangulation (see chapter 3). Also, Appendix 3.13 provides a matrix of claims and the sources that support them, including interviews, documents and newspapers.

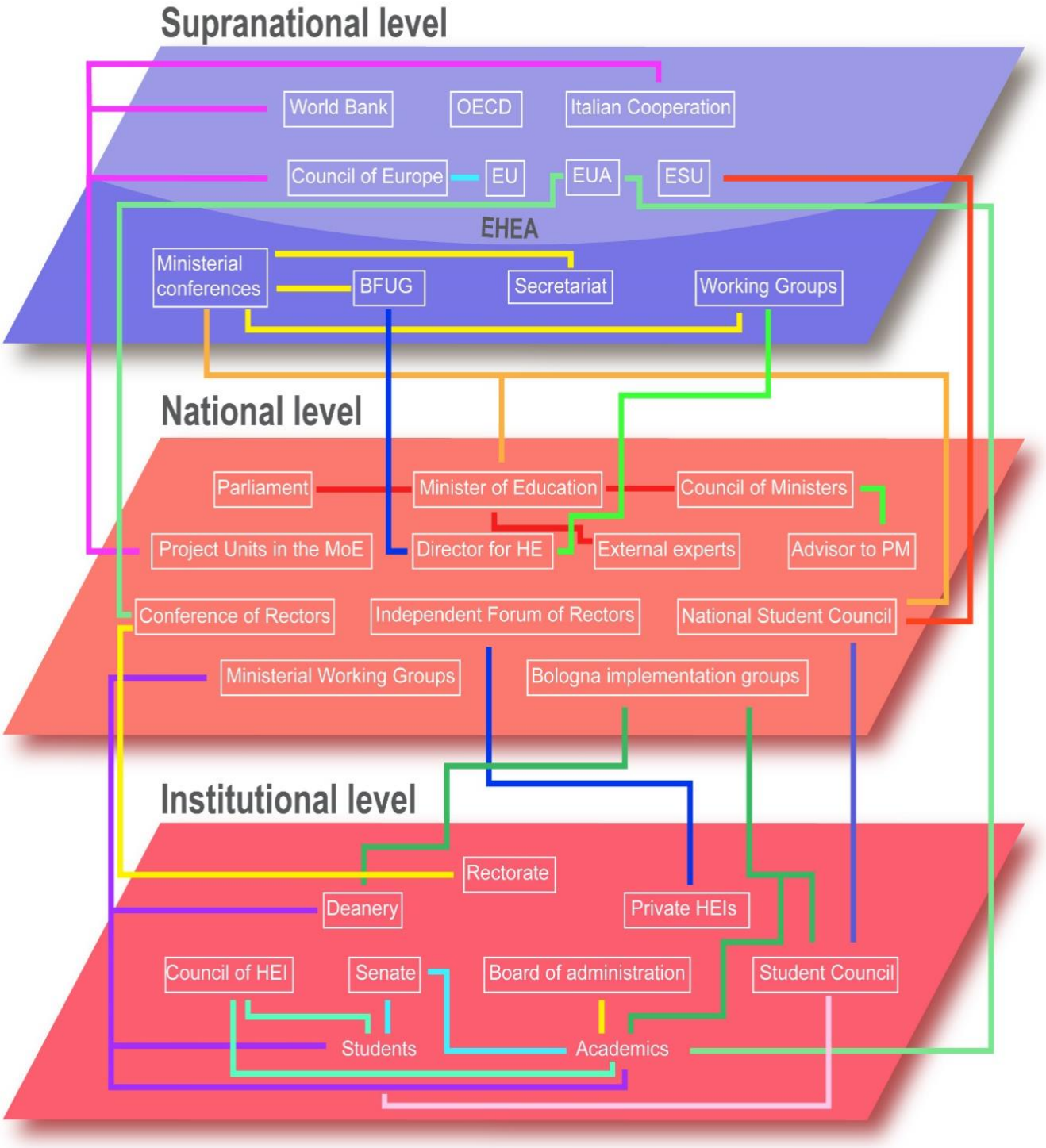


Chart 6.1. Key players engaged in governing higher education, including Bologna, operating at three levels. /Coloured lines are used to display the connection between actors and institutions, each line indicates the body in which actors are represented: eg. Students are represented in the Senate and Council of their HEI, as well as in Ministerial Working Groups.

6.2 Power structures and the political culture

In chapter 2, I explained that I approach this study from a neo-pluralist perspective, which assumes that in liberal societies power is distributed among various actors and groups, and the government is just one among many actors involved in governing processes (Mundy et al., 2016; Goodin, 2011; McFarland, 2010). Furthermore, I discussed how the education policy domain has recently become populated by new actors operating beyond and below the national government. Here, I strive to untangle this complex governing process, by discussing the key players that operate in three levels, as shown in Chart 6.1 (above). In chapter 5, I discussed the Europeanisation process and the policy diffusion from the centre to the periphery, which is led by international actors and mediated through soft governing tools, including socialisation, manipulation and coordination.

Here, I discuss the national power structures that act as mediators in translating international policy agendas into national contexts. Moreover, I analyse the way in which actors operate, and decisions are made, by focusing on formal and social structures, which are underpinned by a political culture that legitimises them. I use examples of other interventions from political actors or social groups, to gauge their power to influence the education policy domain.

Higher education reforms initiated in the 1990s in have helped in the establishment in both countries of various agencies that operate in the field of higher education, which are funded by the state budget and operate under the Executive branch (often under the ministry), although with varying degrees of freedom (OECD, 2015). In this study, I focus less on some of these formal structures, and bring other actors to the centre of analysis, because, as discussed in Chapter 2, my centre of attention is the action elite, which is not so much defined by formal hierarchies, but by their central role in the governing process (Carter & Lawn, 2015).

a. The International level

Bologna is an intergovernmental process, and its highest-level governing body is the conference of ministers of education (EHEA, 2020b). Therefore, the major decisions, such as joining, remaining or exiting from this cooperation are formally taken by the national governments, represented by the minister of education (henceforth the minister). Moreover,

the common policy agenda of Bologna is decided in *communiques* adopted by the ministers, in every ministerial conference.

However, although this cooperation is voluntary, and the ministers are free to defend their country's interests, there are several path-reproducing mechanisms that limit the degree of freedom for the incumbent minister to act. *Firstly*, once a country becomes part of this cooperation, it has to operate within its governing structures and follow its governing procedures, which entails responding to the soft governing tools, discussed in chapter 5.

Secondly, as part of a broader global policy agenda in education, Bologna is intertwined with other international commitments that governments have undertaken (see chapter 4). To illustrate, one of Bologna's main pillars is the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications (Treaty nr.165, 1997), which aims to facilitate the mobility of human capital within the European continent. Ratifying this convention is one of the main indicators of Bologna implementation reports, and both countries have fulfilled it (Lithuanian country report 2003; Law Nr.8834, 22.11.2001). Similarly, the Stabilisation Agreement signed on 22.05.2006 between Albania and the EU, stipulates "A priority for higher education systems [in Albania] shall be the achievement of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration" (Art.100). Thus, under the influence of international agendas on education, countries have been proceeding on Bologna's path, even before joining it, as these quotations indicate:

> …[W]e recognise that there was currently only **limited analytical capacity** within the Ministry of Education and Science **to develop strategic policies** for higher education and research…some good steps forward have been accomplished under the **kindness and the pressure** of the Council of Europe**.** [Thus] The strategy [for Higher Education] is for Albania, but it is **consistent with major trends** in the development of higher education in Europe…
>
> (The Albanian minister, 2007, November, emphasis added)

Thirdly, ministers cannot personally follow the international activity of Bologna. Therefore, they must rely on their staff, who act as a liaison between national and international structures. Among various directorates and agencies operating in this policy domain, the pivotal role is given to the official who represents the country to the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and other Working Groups (WG) that govern the process in the interim between two ministerial

conferences. As discussed in chapter 7, the ministerial conference lasts two to three days, and everything is prepared in advance by the bureaucrats engaged in the BFUG and WGs.

> When I became [minister] the ministry was working on this process, and I was informed [by my staff] that there [was this process going on]
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

> Right after I was appointed minister, I learned from [AP07] about such an organisation of higher education…[AP07] was director for higher education, and [they] informed me about Bologna charter… [He/She] is the key person.
> (AP01, Albanian Minister, signatory of Albania's membership in Bologna)

> As director for higher education, I had the task to inform the ministers and [explain to them] the recent developments, as well as **prospective developments that were expected to occur**, or to put it better, that could probably happen… And [AP01], right away, as soon as they were informed about it, they gave full support for the necessary steps of the process, until the moment of signing it…
> (AP07, Director for higher education, Albanian Ministry)

These actors are given governing responsibilities, that weaken the autonomy of the minister and limit their capacities to govern this policy domain. At the same time, through processes of socialisation and co-option, they become local promoters of a global agenda, raising questions about who they really represent, and whose interests they defend. They enjoy significant power when they speak in the name of powerful organisations, who are seen as legitimate in societies that have lived for a long time on the periphery of empires and relied on a far-away "centre" to provide them with solutions to their domestic problems. For instance, after the Second World War, when the communist government of Albania was striving to establish its higher education system, it asked the USSR to send some expert help (DCM nr.157, 25.05.1957). When, four decades later the same country was trying to reform its higher education system by following a Western education model (Sprague, 2016), it made sense to the policymakers to seek help from the EU and the CoE. Thus, whoever speaks in the name of ideas originating from these international partners, is going to be heard, because while the centre of power has shifted from the East to the West, the relationship of dependency remains.

The fourth constraint on the minister's decision-making power regarding Bologna, is the international role played by national interest groups, which often bypass the national government. For instance, the European University Association (EUA), which represents universities and national conferences of rectors, and the European Student Union (ESU),

which represents National Students Unions, act as consultative members of Bologna, are represented in the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and Working Groups (WGs) (EUA, 2020; ESU, 2020a). Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 7, representatives of students, academics and university leaders are represented in the Bologna ministerial conferences as part of the country's delegation. This international representation gives interest groups direct access to the policymaking process at the international level.

Moreover, this international access empowers stakeholders to exert pressure on the minister to comply with international commitments, increasing the costs of leaving Bologna. For instance, these organisations prepare reports on implementation of Bologna, and submit them to the ministerial conferences, in parallel with the country reports issued by the ministry (EHEA, 2020b). As discussed in chapter 5, the socialisation of interest groups has equipped them with knowledge and skills, as well as with the vocabulary, to employ a global policy discourse and promote global agendas at the national level. To illustrate, the representatives of the Albanian Students' Government (ASG), confirmed during the interview (15.02.2018) that their interest on Bologna originated from their colleagues from ESU (back then called ESIB), who encouraged them to pressure the ministry to join Bologna as soon as possible:

> In 2002 [one year before Albania became part of Bologna] we asked the ministry to apply for membership… You know why? Because we were in contact with ESIB… Basically, they introduced us to [Bologna]. Someone from ESIB came to Albania… and they encouraged us by asking "how come that there is no discussion here about Bologna?"
>
> (AG02, President of the Albanian Students' Government)

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, in this process where the lines between the national and international are blurred, global agendas prevail over national priorities (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). A case in point is the agenda of the Lithuanian National Union of Students (LSS), which is a member of the ESU. As discussed in chapter 5, imbalanced mobility is a major concern in net exporting countries like Lithuania. But from the Yerevan ministerial conference onwards, the issue of imbalanced mobility among EHEA members was overshadowed by a stronger emphasis on balanced mobility among social groups (i.e. social dimension), as shown in the final report of the WG on Mobility and Internationalisation 2012-2015. ESU is represented in

this working group, and its top priority is the *social dimension*, which aims to encourage outward mobility of students from non-mobile social groups (ESU, 2015).

On the other hand, a major concern for Lithuania is the declining number of students, confirmed by two consecutive country reports (2012 and 2015), the very first sentence of which is: "It is projected that the number of students by 2020 will diminish rather noticeably" (p.3). However, between the national concern about *imbalanced mobility* and ESU's agenda on *social mobility*, LSS has chosen to prioritise the latter, as illustrated from the quotations below:

> We do expect that the Bologna process starts to work on *social dimension* issues, about opening up for a diverse group of students… So one of the outcomes that I do hope that will be followed up on, is that the ministries in the communique now ask the BFUG to come up with an agenda on the **social dimension**...
>
> (BG02, President of ESU)

> **Question**: *What is your main concern?*
> Actually, as a Union we are concerned with the **social dimension**… The [national] working group [on Bologna implementation] agreed with us that there are not a lot of mentions [in Bologna texts] about the social dimension…
>
> (LG04, President of the LSS, interviewed in Paris)

> …we [as LSS] work with the **social dimension** of the Bologna Process: How to improve the social dimension in Lithuania.
>
> **Question**: *How did you decide the social dimension as your top priority? Why not another issue?*
> …Actually, it was [LG04]'s ideas to go with this topic. He had meetings with other people, and that is what we are trying to improve.
>
> **Question**: *Are you concerned about the number of students in Lithuania?*
> Yes
> **Question**: *Why don't you tackle that?*
> We do see a lot of problems in higher education institutions, however, in the period of one year, we are not capable of [dealing with everything].
>
> (LG06, representative of the LSS)

This case is an example of the policy of attention (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005), where certain issues are elevated to the top of the agenda occupying limited resources such as time and energy. It also reveals something about the way these organisations decide their priorities, and their accountability to the members they represent.

b. The National level

Apart from constraints faced at the international level, or because of international engagements, the ministers face other national limitations to their decision-making powers. As discussed above, although they are the authorities responsible for the country's membership of Bologna, this path has been laid down by the bureaucracy in the ministry even

before the ministers came to power. For instance, after only a few months in office, the Lithuanian minister who signed the Bologna Declaration, declared in Paris that their higher education system had already been reformed, in line with what was being promoted by the Sorbonne communique:

> We have reformed our study system. We have three levels of studies and we value studies by credits. The Higher education institutions of Lithuania have become open to the world. We consider that this will allow us to enlarge the exchange of students.
>
> (Lithuanian minister, 5 October 1998, Paris)

Similarly, when the Albanian minister who signed the Bologna membership came to office, the country had already ratified the Lisbon convention (Law Nr.8834, 22.11.2001). In his first month in office the ministry established the centre for diploma recognition (DCM, 02.2002), introduced the diploma supplement (25.02.2002) and started piloting the new degree structures in line with Bologna recommendations (Hajderi, 2002). All these processes had taken years to prepare, and the path has continued irrespective of the incumbent minister's political views or party affiliation:

> During my time at the ministry, I have worked with four ministers… [and] I can tell you that all the ministers, for as long as I have been in that position, have had the goodwill to do it [participate in Bologna], regardless of their political affiliations.
>
> (AP07, Director for higher education, Albanian Ministry)

Moreover, these processes generate vast amounts of data, which cannot "speak for themselves" (Ozga, 2018, p.742). Indeed, as discussed in chapter 2, data interpretation is a new mode of governance (Fejes et al., 2009; Grek, 2009). Thus, ministers have to rely on interpretation and translation of these processes by their staff. At other times this expertise is provided by external advisors, whose knowledge is purchased with the help of international partners (Hajderi, 2000, June 16), as discussed in chapter 5:

> I think we had expertise from Norway... I think the main transformations in high education in Lithuania were from external…experts, from Norwegian experts, [who helped us how] **to identify our problems, how to solve them**…
>
> (LP03, Lithuanian Minister of Education)

> [All legal acts] were consulted with our European colleagues… So, we've got, we've received the **most advanced ideas** on the development of higher education in Europe... and **one of the main experts [we had] was English**
>
> (AP02, director for HE in the Albanian ministry)

> We've had a very good expert who was British, English. He has been Thatcher's advisor... A man who loved Albania. He would beg me "encourage your colleagues to do this, to do that".
>
> (AP03, advisor for education to the Prime Minister of Albania)

Such expertise is seen as invaluable, in the social and political context of the time when it is received. However, as discussed in chapter 2, by interpreting domestic problems through international lens, the ministers' response is framed within a limited repertoire of definitions of problems or solutions (Cloutier and Langley, 2013). Thus, although they are *de jure* in charge of decision-making, *de facto* their responsibilities are reduced to choosing within a restricted set of available policy ideas presented to them.

Secondly, Bologna implementation has produced normative path dependence mechanisms, for it has encouraged national legislative reforms that require the support of the Council of Ministers and the Parliament. In both countries the ministry can prepare draft laws, which have to pass through the Government Office to the Parliament (i.e. Seimas in Lithuania), where they are discussed in the parliamentarian commission for Education, before they are voted by a simple majority in the plenary session (OECD, 2015; The Constitution of Albania, 1998; The Constitution of Lithuania, 1992). Thus, while joining Bologna was a prerogative of the minister, once this process has entered the national legal framework, they need the support of the Council of Ministers and the Parliament, to change this path.

A third limitation on ministers' governing responsibilities is the influence exerted by domestic interest groups (Beyers et al., 2008). As discussed in chapter 2, the education policy domain is dominated by policy elites who have taken a central role in governing processes (Mundy et al.,2016), in what has been theorised as "network governance" (Bevir, 2010; Heclo, 1978). In corporatist systems of Western Europe, interest groups are formally represented in the governing process, with the power to influence policymaking (Lijphart, 2012; Siaroff, 1999). In other countries the influence of interest groups is limited to methods such as lobbying, issue framing and agenda setting, through public visibility and attention (Beyers et al., 2008).

However, post-communist countries like Lithuania and Albania have inherited a weak civil society (Silova, 2009), and few mechanisms are available to interest groups to influence

policy-making (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2017; McAdam et al.,2009). In line with what Chaisty & Whitefield (2015) found in their studies of political legacy in post-communist societies, Sprague, (2016, p.125) argues that "Albania's experience clearly testifies that the destruction of a totalitarian regime does not *automatically* lead to an open civil society."

The legacy of the past regime has vividly persisted in the collective memory. This is evidenced in the high degree of distance between members of society and those in power[8] (Hofstede, 2001). Furthermore, being excluded for a long time from the decision-making process has encouraged actors to feel a lack of personal responsibility for public policies (see Arendt, 1963). Consequently, actors tend to complain only about their own experience of policy, treating it as an idiosyncratic unfortunate event, instead of fighting for institutional change that would better represent the interests of their social group:

> **Question**: *Do you feel any pressure from universities to represent something in Bologna? Do they ask you to lobby in Europe for this or that?*
>
> [surprised] Which universities? Ours?!
>
> **Question:** *Yes. Is there some kind of pressure from interest groups?*
>
> No. No, no. There isn't. There are no interest groups at all. It's strange...[They only come] if there are personal interests involved, [such as] certain individuals **want to ask for any trip abroad**… You see, when do our academics protest? …they fight just for their salaries [laughs]. It's a disgrace. I am part of the ministry, but I often wonder how come they do not speak up for certain things. And you see that there is zero reaction.
>
> (P04, Director for Higher Education, Albanian Ministry)

On the other hand, both countries inherited a public administration governed by a political culture of hierarchical decision-making process and little horizontal coordination, which gives priority to compliance with rules and orders (Nakrosis, 2001; OECD, 2015). In the previous regime universities were under the total control of the ministry, which appointed university leaders, academic staff, and administered student admissions (DCM nr.140, 07.03.1960). However, in a bid to depart from this autocratic style of government, both countries introduced legal reforms to involve stakeholders in the policy-making process, through consultations, public hearings, and working groups (OECD, 2015; Law nr.146/2014). Furthermore, to increase the autonomy of higher education, legal reforms established representative

[8] Albania has one of the highest power-distance score (90/100) in the Hofstede's index

organisations such as the Conference of Rectors and National Students Unions (Albanian Law nr.8461, 1999; Lithuanian law on HE 12.02.1991). Furthermore, in line with Bologna requirements, ministries established *ad-hoc* committees such as the National BFUG or the Bologna promoters group, composed of representatives of university leaders, academics and students (EHEA country reports, 2004; 2008). Similarly, they formed working groups to prepare Bologna reforms (Pollo, 2007, November; Peshkepia, 2001), and give interest groups some degree of influence over policy formulation:

> We [as an academic community] definitely have some influence on the decisions. Our people are members of the expert panels [and], they are contributing to the development of the system through their advice
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public University)

Notwithstanding the progress towards the autonomy of higher education, the ministry retains control over public HEIs. While the Lithuanian ministry exerts mainly financial control over public HEIs (Martinaitis et al., 2016), the Albanian counterpart has retained control over their finances, organisation structures, tuition fees, student numbers and admission process (Alimehmeti & Hysa, 2012). This dependence limits the ability of interest groups to defend their interests, even when they are formally represented in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, there is value stability (see chapter 2) related to the centralisation of power, and therefore actors who have long experience of autocratic rule may perceive it as appropriate and legitimate. For instance, the ministers, who are part of this culture, do not shy away from expressing their ability to impose their will on to the academic community, as illustrated by the Albanian minister who argued that the new law on the HE, introduced by his government, "deliberately stops short of the full autonomy" for universities, because they were not ready for it. A similar worldview is displayed by the other ministers:

> I just formed my own opinion that it was a good thing. A minister is all-powerful to lead the sector towards European standards. I was convinced that it was an excellent system and I did everything in my power to bring it to Albania.
>
> (AP05, Albanian Minister)
>
> **Question**: *How did you convince the universities to change the degree structure?*
> The government had very strong power from a financing perspective, and from a legal perspective. Also, in 2000 Lithuania, adopted a new law for high education, including new instruments of financing…
>
> (LP03, Lithuanian Minister)

Referring to institutions in western Europe, Musselin (2009, p.187) argues that academic communities show a paradoxical strength by acting as “defensive territories”, when they feel threatened. Indeed, as evidence suggests, the discontent of academic communities against Bologna has been mainly focused on the new degree cycle, which was perceived to threaten their personal interests, related to job security (interview with AP01; LP02; AG09; AG15). However, they showed various degrees of strength in “defending their territories”. Thus, while both countries share many similarities regarding their political culture, including low levels of corporatism (Jahn, 2016), the academic community in Lithuania has been more influential than that of Albania in defending their interests and preferences. For instance, they managed to stop the introduction of the new three-year bachelor's degree, which has been the centre of debate in many countries (see Mause, 2013; Rudder, 2010). To date, Lithuania remains one of the few EHEA countries with a four-year first degree (Lithuanian country report, 2006).

> **Question:** *Can you say that joining Bologna was solely a minister's decision?*
> Yes. Well, it was supported by the research community. The rectors, at that time, were very close to the ministry and they had their own association which was called Lithuanian Rectors Conference…
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public University)

> **Question**: *A bachelor degree in most of the EHEA countries is three years. Here it is still 4 years. Why is that?*
>
> Because universities didn't want [it]. The staff of professors [laughs] wanted to have more hours, more students.
>
> (LP02, Minister of Education, signatory of Bologna declaration)

On the other hand, the academic community in Albania has shown less strength, mainly due to the political culture discussed above. Thus, although interest groups have been formally represented in the decision-making process, they have been invited less to influence the policy formulation, and more to guarantee the compliance of the groups that they represent. For example, the conference of rectors, which is supposed to defend the interests of universities, is often referred to as a “consultative body” of the minister:

> The Ministry has had excellent cooperation with the conference of rectors at that time. This cooperation was indispensable… The Conference of Rectors was an **advisory board to the minister**… It was very important, because it guaranteed enforcement of the bylaws issued by the ministry…
>
> (AP07, director for higher education, Albanian ministry)

Moreover, countries like Albania score low in the accountability index produced by the World Bank (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2011), in the democracy Index produced by the Freedom House (2020), and in the corruption index, produced by the Transparency International corruption[9] (TI, 2020). Therefore, public officials are more likely to abuse their political power, display low levels of accountability, and use public office for personal benefit:

> Rectors were merely an extension of the government. They behaved in a medieval manner. No matter in which city or university... He [a rector] would say; I'm here in my own territory. He had built a fence, and all he was asking was nobody to step on his territory. Does the minister want this? agreed. Does he want that? Agreed.
>
> (AP03 – Advisor on Education to the Albanian Prime Minister)

Consequently, although there is evidence that the academic community and their representatives in Albania have been unhappy with the Bologna reforms (Shqiptarja, 2013, October 11), they have not been able to prevent them. Similarly, another neo-liberal reform in higher education, introduced in 2015 by the Albanian government, (Gjonca, 2014, April), although criticised by the academic community (Erebara, 2015, April 08), was supported by the university leaders. Incidentally, these leaders benefited from high fees for consultation with the government on this reform, and one them left his role as vice-rector of the largest university to become vice-minister of education. Indeed, many academics have felt powerless and betrayed by their university leaders, as illustrated by the following exchange:

> They were complicit [with the minister].
>
> **Question**: *Who?*
>
> University Rectors. Let's tell it as it is.
>
> (AG16, University professor, public university, Albania)

The most recent interest group should be *private HEIs*, which, unlike their public counterparts, are not financially dependent on the ministry. Furthermore, emerging only in the 2000s (DCM Nr.156, 22.03.2001), they do not have a history of subordination to the ministry, allowing them to establish another relationship with it. Furthermore, they are organised in consortia and other organisations, such as the Independent Forum of Rectors (2015, November 13). Through being well-organised, having financial incentives, and small group size, they became an

[9] Albania scored 2.5 out of 10, in the Corruption Perception Index, when it joined Bologna in 2003

effective group in lobbying the ministry, and influencing policy-making in education (see Olson, 1967). For example, they have been accused of exerting undue influence in shaping the higher education reform of 2015 in Albania discussed above (Gurakuqi, 26.08.2020; Gjuraj, 23.11.2016). Thus, it would be reasonable to assume that they have the power, coordination and communication channels to influence decision-making related to Bologna, in defending their vested interests. Why they have not done so is discussed in the following section.

> We, as the private sector, are absolutely much more organized, better structured, [e.g.] we have [established] the Independent Forum of Rectors… [For instance] last Saturday, we reflected on the output and challenges of the last 15 years for the private higher education sector in Albania. Our forum advances the common interest or tackles common concerns of our sector.
>
> (AG10, rector of private HEI in Albania, promoter of the Independent Forum of Rectors)

Another organised group of interests operating at the national level is the *students*. In Albania, the higher education law of 1999 (art.33) recognised the right of students to organise in student organisations, which allowed them to establish the Albanian Students Government (ASG) and speak with a unified voice. As discussed above, this organisation was active in exerting pressure on the ministry regarding the implementation of Bologna. The law on higher education in 2007 (Nr.9741), however, produced some confusion and conflict among competing student organisations. Thus, embroiled in legal interpretations and destructive competition, the national student council dissolved, leaving student representation only at the institutional level (AP04;AG12;AG17;AG20). To date, Albanian students do not have official representation in Bologna, and the EHEA website still shows ASG as the national student representative body (EHEA, 2020c), although it stopped working more than a decade ago.

> The last elections for the student council are held in 2010, and they had a two-year term. Thus, from 2012 onwards there has been no [National] student council for all public universities in Albania.
>
> (G20 – focus group with representatives of students' councils in Albania)

In Lithuania, as discussed above, the student representative body at the national level is the Lithuanian National Union of Students (LSS) established in 1991, after the new law on Research and Higher Education (12.02.1991). Recent laws have increased the power of students even further, allowing them to submit proposals directly to the Seimas or to the Government (Art.57), to evaluate tuition fees before they are submitted for approval (Art.22/5),

and participate in assessment assurance procedures at national and institutional level (Law Nr.XI-242, 30.04.2009; Lithuanian country report, 2008). Furthermore, LSS collaborates closely with the ministry, and often acts as a revolving door. For instance, some of its former leaders went straight from the LSS to work for the ministry, in some cases even playing a pivotal role as country representatives in the BFUG (ESU, 2016, July 26; EHEA, 2020d).

> We are participating in the working groups [in the Ministry of Education], so we can suggest a lot of things. But, in other cases, we don't have voting rights, so that's why we have to lobby.
>
> (LG04, President of the National Students Union)

Theoretically, this access to policy-making should have increased their influence on policymaking process (see Heywood, 2013), but it is difficult to accurately gauge their power regarding the Bologna reforms, because there is no evidence of any clash in perspective between them and the ministry in pursuing this international policy agenda. However, when I asked leaders of LSS to illustrate their power with an example, several of them told me the same story, in which they forced the government to backtrack from introducing tuition fees:

> **Question**: *Can you tell me a success story of your organisation?*
>
> The success story is, I don't remember the case, but our reaction was that the student unions called each other in Lithuania and they had a plan to send a lot of **faxes** to the government. The main thing that if you get a fax, you have to register it. So, in the morning until 8 A.M, all the student unions sent a lot of faxes to the government and actually, the Prime Minister called the President of the Union and said that: "Yes, stop it and we will stop our law." So, in this case, our reaction was to send faxes...
>
> **Question**: *What was the law about?*
>
> Now, as students, you don't have to pay the fee for health insurance because the government does it... the government wanted to change that.
>
> (LG04, President of the LSS)

However, the details of this story, which seems to have occurred 25 years ago, are described differently in their official website (lss.lt, 2020):

> [the president of the organisation] travelled extensively to Western countries with deep democratic traditions.... Returning from the travels, full of ideas, he organized a campaign "Let's close the government with postcards", during which students distributed 10 thousand postcards, demanding to guarantee free education [and] to introduce a credit system…

Thus, boasting about such an old success story, of which they do not even seem to remember the details accurately, may indicate either an absence of recent contradictions between student councils and the ministry, or a limited power to influence its policy agenda in education.

c. The Institutional level

As discussed above, both countries have inherited a centralised system of higher education, where the decision-making process has been top-down from the minister to the university rector, to faculty dean, and the head of department (Duro, 2012).

> In Soviet times, we had a hierarchical system. The system was integrated vertically. You had a big boss - someone at the top who had some kind of deputy. Everything was very much centralized. I would not say that we had anything described as academic freedom in the Soviet time.
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public University)

In the early 1990s they introduced legal reforms that *inter alia* aimed at increasing the autonomy of HEIs. In 1999, Albania introduced the concept of elections of the rector from the senate (Law. 8461, Art. 15 - 18), following a similar model to that used by Lithuania (Law Nr.XI-242, 2009, Art. 22/3). Later laws have introduced several changes, but the principle of electing university leaders, rectors and deans from the academic community and students has remained (Law 80/2015). However, when this democratic policy encountered existing power relations within unaccountable institutions, it created unintended consequences, incentivising *quid pro quo* relationships between academics and university leaders. On the one hand, the competencies of university leaders to recruit academic staff gives them leverage over the professoriate in their institution. On the other hand, the power of the academics to elect university leaders increases their bargaining power. Consequently, some sources suggest that candidates for faculty dean or university rector use their public office to guarantee votes for their term. In contrast, academics use their vote in exchange for a promise of employment or other favours within academic settings (Dita, 2018, December 11).

Moreover, this polarised environment has given rise to political partisanship (see Sprague, 2016), which is supported by external influences. Political parties, and in some rare instances even organised crime (Koni, 2016, June 06), have tried to influence elections within universities, as well as recruitment of academic staff (Qori, 2020, July 27).

> Thus, we have academics, but we do not have an academic community. Because there are no chain-links, so to speak, that would enable the normal functioning of a community. And why these links are not created?... the simplest possible explanation is that universities here have always been captured by political parties. Every university election… is absolutely influenced by political parties…
>
> (AG06, lecturer, researcher, public HEI)

Indeed, both countries have inherited a legacy of an autocratic regime, where a strong presence of the party suspends the decision-making power of the public administration (OECD, 2015; Synnerström, 1997). For instance, the communist party had a Party Committee and a Youth Committee in every university, which severely limited the formal powers of the university leaders to govern the institution (DCM, nr.197, 25.05.1957).

> The university has gained a minimum of autonomy from the state or the government. At least formally. That is to say, the fact that university leaders are not appointed by the Minister of Education or the government is an achievement... Relatively because... well... we elect one-another. Still, the government or **the main political parties** have... within our community, within the academics, within the students, within the deans, they have their people.
>
> (AG17, lecturer, civil society activist, public HEI in Albania)

Another active group within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is the students, who are formally represented with at least 10% of the senate seats in HEIs in Albania (Law 80/2015) and at least 20% in Lithuania (Law Nr.XI-242, Art. 21/5). Anxious about its application for Bologna membership, the ministry tried to prepare a list of achievements before the Berlin ministerial conference of 2003. Therefore, *inter alia*, it allowed student representatives to vote, alongside academics, to elect the faculty deans and the university rector.

> Concerning the participation of students in governing universities and higher schools, all the necessary legal room has been provided for the participation of students in the elections for the leading authorities at the Higher Schools (Rector, Dean, Head of Department) as well as for other representative bodies (Senate, Faculty Council) and the election of the representatives from the students themselves in these bodies and entities.
>
> (The application letter for Bologna membership, 17.09.2003, p.2)

However, history shows that formal participation does not provide automatic representation. For instance, in the previous regime, students elected by their peers were given one-third of all seats in university councils (Duro, 2012), but decisions were taken elsewhere. Similarly, although formally students are represented in governing structures within HEIs, there are allegations that political parties, or university leaders control them. Indeed, *because* of the formal powers introduced with the law mentioned above, student councils have become

weaker, as it created incentives for university leaders to control them. For instance, there are allegations that immediately after the legal amendments of 2003, university leaders sought to control elections to student councils and in "appointing" their cronies to the governing bodies within the university (Grrica, 2019, July 5; Nako, 2015, November 6).

> The student council elections were held at the same time with the election of rectors and deans...According to the law, a student [representative] was elected by students. *De facto* [he/she] was elected… well, they were appointed by the [faculty] dean, like "okay, you are the one"...
> [The student council] was an extension of the dean... [because they] were very interested in who would get elected [because] it was a vote that would help [re]elect the dean… At least all students that I've known to have been members of the council, are lecturers [in the same public HEI] today…
>
> (AG02, former leader of the ASG)

> You see in the senate meetings, students putting their hands up and down entirely against the interests of students. And this is the real drama... And generally, the student councils in Albania are submissive to university leaders.
>
> (AP04, Director for Higher Education, Albanian ministry)

During my interviews with students, including the group interview in Tirana (AG20) I was able to observe how this hierarchical relationship was internalised and normalised by students and their representatives. The following quotation from the president of the student council in one public HEI in Tirana illustrates how some of them visualise the hierarchy by referring to students as "those at the bottom" and university leaders as "those on top".

> **Question**: *Are you suggesting that the moment students become part of representative bodies, they start benefiting from it. Is this what you are saying?*
>
> Until now, yes, this one at the bottom [the student] hopes for the day when the one on the top [the dean] will elect him. At least that is what the experience, until now, has shown. Anyone will break at the slightest clash... every student.
>
> (AG20, focus group with representatives of student councils, and members of the HEIs' senate in Albania)

Studies have shown that political parties have tried to extend their influence over the student councils, and control their activity (Keta & Vuksani, 2019). Incidentally, one of the Focus Group participants that I interviewed in Tirana had two roles: as a member of their HEI's senate, and as vice/chair of the youth forum of one of the main political parties in Albania.

6.3 The cognitive consensus

a. The shared understanding

It is assumed by proponents of rational choice theories that actors choose the alternative that will maximise their utility (Brennan & Buchanan, 2008). Still, as discussed in chapter 2, actors are often ill-informed, and cannot accurately anticipate the outcome of their actions. In accordance with this line of reasoning, Ravinet (2008) argues that ministers joined Bologna without adequate information about its consequences. Indeed, the political and economic context at the time when the decision was taken, placed limitations on the ministers' ability to be fully informed about the process, as the following quotations suggest:

> [A]fter gaining independence, Lithuania, for many reasons, was interested in joining the EU **as soon as possible** accepting all suggested conditions and doing it in principle automatically..**.** There were too many problems to be solved and **no time to study the situation** […] Moreover, as we came from [the] Soviet Union – a very closed country - **our understanding about [the] EU and its policies, in many fields, was limited**.
>
> (LG11, email correspondence, 16.07.2018, university professor, Public HEI in Lithuania, emphasis added)

> And with the consequences of course. We wouldn't see negative consequences at that time…[W]e we're thinking, **maybe not in the right way**, that the [Bologna] system can be more economic.
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

However, as discussed above, the ministers and their staff had been exposed very early to the policy agenda promoted by Bologna and they were familiar with it before joining this cooperation (Mesuesi, 09.10.2002; Hajderi, 1998). As discussed in chapter 5, Albania started piloting the new degree system proposed by Bologna two years before its application was accepted. Moreover, the ministry organised various study visits to Romania, Italy, Germany and France (Peshkepia, 2001; interviews with AP01; AP02; AP07), and was keeping the HEIs updated on Bologna progress in other countries (doc. Nr.799, 11.07.2001).

Not only were the policy elites informed about the process, but they also understood that reducing barriers to mobility would increase international competition for students, as indicated in this quotation from the Lithuanian President's annual address to the nation:

> It must not be forgotten that in the open area of education they [Lithuanian HEIs] will be facing an ever-tougher **competition** from **foreign universities in attracting Lithuanian students**.
>
> (Adamkus, 2002, emphasis added)

Similarly, the following quotation of 2004 from the Albanian minister who signed the Bologna membership shows awareness of the ramifications of higher outward mobility:

> Globalization and integration processes that we are experiencing, **as everyone knows**, come with…**opening of the political borders**. As a result, the necessary facilities are being created to allow free movement of the most skilled… All these students and specialists receive their basic education and university diplomas in countries of origin. Hence, the cost of their training is paid by the country of origin, not the host country… The global labour market for advanced human capital is a reality in many developing countries, and it has brought to our countries the *brain drain* phenomenon. This phenomenon **cannot pass without adverse effects**...Even the universities that prepare this human capital find it difficult to **recruit professors** with advanced degrees, and due to the insufficiency in qualified staff they gradually suffer from a **decline in the quality of teaching**.
>
> (AP01, speech delivered in the conference of the rectors of Balkan universities, 04.12.2004, pp.2-3)

Thus, lack of information does not provide a satisfactory explanation of why the losers joined this cooperation. It may be the case that some key actors did not (and probably still do not) fully appreciate the consequences of this policy agenda, but this is not due to lack of information, rather it follows from the way in which information is interpreted and understood. To illustrate, actors were exposed to criticism of Bologna, during their study visits in other countries (interviews with AP02; AP06; AP07; AP09; AP15). However, they believed that this criticism applied exclusively to these countries and was irrelevant to their own situation:

> Of course, in the contacts and collaboration that we have had with our Italian colleagues, there have also been critical voices [about Bologna]. This is natural… I have also seen important people, such as the rector of La Sapienza University in Rome, Italy, who gave his own opinions… But we were with this idea; we embraced this process and step by step, we were working to [pause] apply it...
>
> (AP02, director for HE in the Albanian ministry)

There are several mental maps applied to filter out information, beginning with the desire to do things “like abroad”. As discussed in chapter 2, actors use similarity and congruence to decide what is appropriate behaviour for them (March & Olsen, 2011, p.480). In chapter 5, I noted that the long period of isolation encouraged these societies to admire their previous “adversaries” in the West (Sprague, 2016). Thus, the power of attraction of the “European model” has shaped actors’ understanding and persuaded them that everything coming from the centre of Europe is more advanced, than what is local, hence the desire to be “like abroad”.

> [Bologna] was somehow related to the **establishment of the identity of the nation** and its position in European and global research... **what was considered as good was to associate with the Western** system…Just to become like them who are prosperous, efficient, very influential
>
> (LG02, Faculty Dean, Public HEI in Lithuania, emphasis added)

This admiration often suspends critical thinking and encourages imitation. The most telling example is the length of the first-degree cycle, which has been at the centre of frustration with Bologna in Albania. More than 44 hours of interviews failed to explain satisfactorily why the Albanian policy-makers were persuaded that they had to adopt the three-year cycle. In a follow-up email I made a final attempt to ask the minister who introduced it (AP01), and the key official (AP07) who led the process, to explain why the first degree was decided to be three years in length. The minister outsourced the analysis process to "some European body" who had done it for them, whereas AP07 tried to rationalise it by referring to some social problems faced by Italian society, which were irrelevant to the Albanian context:

> ...to implement the [Bologna] *Charter*, **a European body** detailed the structural, organizational, curricular standards… In these standards, it was determined that the first degree (i.e. Bachelor's), could not be less than three academic years. That is implemented in the majority of European Higher Education Institutions.
>
> (AP01, email correspondence, 08.09.2020, emphasis added)

> At that time, the average graduation age in ITALY was 30 years old, and the cost of studies incurred to the state and families was quite high. The objective of BD [Bologna] was to allow students to get into the labour market as soon as possible…
>
> (AP07, email correspondence, 09.09.2020)

Now compare that answer to the following quote from one of the founders of Bologna:

> What made the decision was that...Juurgen Ruttgers said that he had a very important argument which was, American studies are much shorter than in France. …if we do the undergraduate in four years, it means that our students are stupid and that they need more training than the Americans…[T]hus we decided to move to three years.
>
> (Interview FM1, 2 April 2007, cited in Hoareau, 2012)

Secondly, Bologna membership is widely perceived as a learning process by the policy elite in both countries. To that end, international partners take the role of an external authority who are there to teach and assess, whereas national actors aspire to become "model pupils" (see Rinne et al., 2004). Congruently, jumping on the bandwagon of this cooperation is seen as an opportunity to identify problems, and to learn how to improve the quality of higher education.

> I discussed with the minister [my predecessor], who signed from the side of Lithuania this document, and I understood that [Bologna] was very important for Lithuania to participate… because **we must identify our problems** in high education…[and it] is very important **to solve our problems in an international context** and this process is a good chance… I think [**mobility] is the main instrument** for the development of [our higher education], to accelerate the development of **quality** [and] standards…
>
> (LP03, Lithuanian minister)

> We were thirsty for knowledge. [We wanted] just to see
> **Question**: *Was this a policy learning process in a way?*
> Absolutely. A school in itself.
>
> (AP01, Albanian minister)

> We really [just] wanted to hear, and see where other countries were standing, given that they have been applying [Bologna] for a long time, **and compare** it with our situation…Thus, Bologna in itself is considered a kind of **school for higher education**… A school for the school, but a model also. An almost scholastic model.
>
> (AP06, Albanian minister)

This approach might explain why many actors associate Bologna with higher quality. For instance, statistical data show that the majority of academics in Albania believe that the main purpose of Bologna is to improve the quality of studies (Qefalia & Totoni, 2012). Similarly, the discourse employed by the policy elite around this process is dominated by a terminology that emphasises the opportunity to improve quality. For instance, when I asked a former Albanian minister which words best depict Bologna, he/she selected these in the following order**:** **European, Quality, Western** (Interview AP05, 20.02.2018). Similarly, Chart 6.2 (below), which visualises the word frequency in my interview with the Lithuanian minister in the ministerial conference of Paris (LP01, 24.05.2018), reveals that three of the most used terms are “better”, “quality” and “competition”. In this context, even when actors see the negative net balance of student mobility, they believe that rather than contributing to the problem, Bologna will help to solve it. The most telling example is the lecture delivered in 2009 by then the Albanian minister, in which they gave a list of reasons that motivated their administration to join Bologna, which included *brain drain (number 5)* and the *decline in the quality of studies* (number 6) (AP01, lecture delivered at a private HEI in Tirana, 2009, pp.1-2).



Chart. 6.2 – Interview with the Lithuanian minister, on 24.05.2018. Word cloud produced with NVivo

Nevertheless, there was hardly anyone who had pinned their hopes on this process to increase inward mobility. Most of my informants (60%) believe that HEIs in their country do not have the capacity to attract international students:

> **Question**: *Did you consider the opportunity to increase inward mobility as one of the advantages of Bologna membership?*
>
> It was **not fundamental**, to be honest. There was only one fundamental thing: [International] Recognition of diplomas acquired in Albania.
>
> (AP01, Albanian minister, who applied for membership)
>
> We understood that many students will leave…At that time [when we joined Bologna] we didn't expect [inbound students], but in the future, of course, we were thinking about it.
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

However, they believed that greater mobility would facilitate knowledge transfer and help them to improve the quality of studies, and therefore students would have fewer incentives to leave:

> [Mobility was important] **because we wanted to raise the quality** of our universities since no one of our universities was in those [top] 500 universities of the world. [We thought that] they [graduates] will come back and they will teach maybe, and there will be an exchange of ideas and exchange of knowledge.
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian minister)

a. The common sense: TINA

Rationalists point to competitive situations to test their theory, predicting that utility maximisers will be the only ones to succeed (Ostrom, 1998). However, competition in itself is constructed in social interactions and is driven by social and cultural norms, which guide actors' behaviour by defining what is appropriate in any given context (Müller, 2004) (see chapter 2).

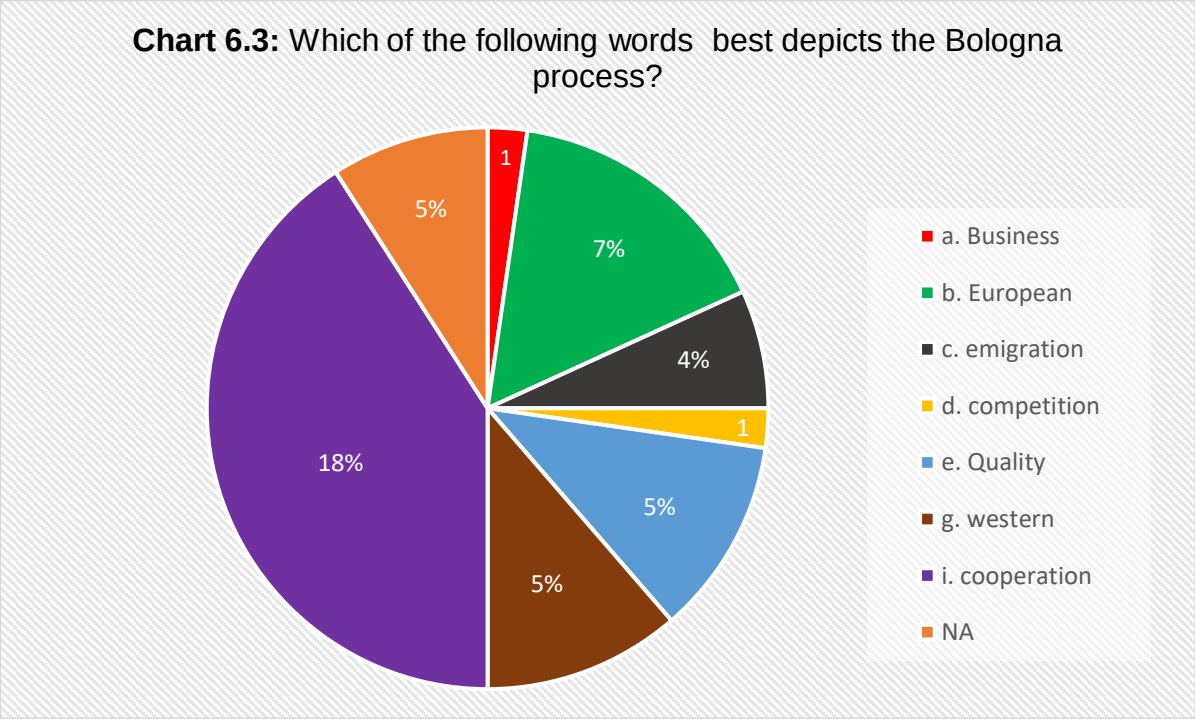


Chart 6.3 Results of the questionnaire administered with my informants

In the same vein, in both countries the component of international competition in Bologna is overlooked, and the consensus among the policy elite is that their country cannot, and probably should not, compete with other developed countries for students. To illustrate, when I asked my informants to pick a word that best depicts Bologna, only one of them chose "competition", as illustrated in Chart 6.3 (above). When I investigated this issue further, I realised that many university leaders, including those of private HEIs, considered international competition for students as far-fetched, and unrealistic in their circumstances.

> **Question**: *Who are your competitors?*
>
> Our main competitor is the public sector. The number of those [students] going abroad is negligible. It does not exceed…[tries to find the percentage], say… a certain percentage that is negligible. And for countries like Albania, this exchange or the integration with the [rest of the] world, is seen as an advantage, not a loss.
>
> (AG08, president of a private HEI, Albania)

Firstly, self-criticism and being in awe of Europe, has legitimised the international hierarchy and has persuaded the policy elite to resort to imitation, instead of considering the competition:

> When I was invited to join this university, I asked the owners of the university: "Do you want to establish **an Albanian university**, **or** do you want **a university of excellence**, projected at the international level?"… and that's where the road split into two different paths: that of a national university, normal, with an Albanian degree, and the other one.
>
> (AP07, executive staff, private HEI, Albania)

> I can be one of the best [in Albania], but I cannot pretend to say that I try as hard as [students] in Milan, for example... Indeed, a paramedic in Milan [studies] a book of 1300 pages. A senior student in Albania is petrified to see a book of 600 pages…Thus his [grades] **cannot be compared** to those of students in Albania.
>
> (AG20, president of a student council, public HEI, Albania FG participant)

To illustrate, during my fieldwork I asked my informants about their thoughts on the issue of automatic diploma recognition. I was struck by the fact that most of them saw the lack of reciprocity as fair when it involved more developed systems, such as the UK. The most telling example is the following quotation from the Lithuanian minister during the Paris conference. We were discussing the Bologna implementation progress, and I asked if they thought that British HEIs had an unfair advantage when their diplomas are easily recognised in Lithuania, but not vice versa. Automatic diploma recognition is one of the main Bologna commitments, and from that perspective the UK is not fulfilling its obligations. However, the Lithuanian minister LP01 did not blame the UK, but rather found fault with his own system for not doing enough to deserve the UK's trust. Other ministers displayed the same approach to it:

> **Question**: *Do you feel that today, 20 years later, this relationship in diploma recognition is reciprocal between you and the UK?*
>
> I'm sure that such relation **shouldn't be equal**, because [it] is based not in political agreements, but in the level of university education. If many British universities are really high in [ranking, but] our universities are not, it is **natural** that they have to check [our diplomas].
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister, signatory of the Bologna declaration)

> **Question**: *Is it okay if recognition of diplomas is not reciprocal between you and the UK?*
> Yes, of course, it is not a problem. I know that maybe we don't have the situation [of higher education quality of British universities]
>
> (LP03, Lithuanian Minister)

Secondly, the majority of the policy elite do not see any other alternative to the way things are. In chapter 2 I discussed the concept of *common sense*, which is used by Gramsci (1971) to explain how hierarchies and subordination are perceived as natural. In the same way, the discourse employed by the policy elite in both countries, suggests that this international hierarchy, as well as migration and *brain drain* are seen as natural phenomena, as illustrated by the following quotation from two Lithuanian researchers:

> The migration of highly qualified persons is a **natural phenomenon** of this century which is called as knowledge society or knowledge economy era…
> It is important to highlight that for **small, developing countries like Lithuania**, it is very **difficult to compete** with the countries, which are more developed and thus can suggest more attractive, suitable work, living conditions for researches
> (Daugeliene & Marcinkeviciene, 2009, pp.49, 55)

Similarly, ministers themselves seem to perceive (or at least present) the *brain drain* as a natural phenomenon, which the government is powerless to influence, other than by increasing mobility even further. For instance, two-thirds of my informants believe that: "the government cannot do much to prevent students from studying abroad", even the ministers who signed the Bologna membership *agreed* (AP01) or *strongly agreed* (LP02), with it:

> In the [Bologna's ministerial conferences] the problem [of brain drain] was not in the first plan. Never, because we understood that is a **natural process** and it is dangerous for every country like Lithuania, but **only mobility**, only the changes with reforms is [sic] the main tools **to solve the problem**.
> (LP03, Lithuanian Minister)

However, this does not mean that actors are happy with the way things are, but they believe that There Is No Alternative to it (TINA) (Crehan, 2011). In chapter 1, I discussed several alternative paths that the losers could have chosen. Still, almost half of my informants (42.8%) believe that Bologna is the only alternative for their country.

> For us there is one way only: the way to go to Europe…
> **Question**: *Does Albania have any alternative to Bologna?*
> What other models can we have? [shrugs] We, don't have any other model [pauses and then asks me unconvinced] the American model? [pauses again] probably.
> (AP05, Albanian minister)

Consequently, those in charge of winning the international competition for students do not see competition as realistic. Indeed, directly, through their advice, or indirectly, through their example (see below), they encourage their own students to study abroad:

> I never become jealous. Absolutely!... The faculty [that I lead] is one of the best in Albania, but it is never as good as the other ones [in Europe] **from which we learn**. We wish our students could go there…what makes me happy is that [our] students manage to cope very well with master studies [abroad].
>
> (AG13, dean of faculty, former chair of the conference of rectors)

Academics, on the other hand, often feel caught between their professional responsibilities towards the institution where they work, and their moral duties to their students, as it is best depicted in the following quotation from one my interviews in Albania:

> ***Question:*** *Does the high outflow rate of your best students concern you?*
>
> No, it does not. Because I think it's an excellent opportunity for students to get a better quality [education] ... as long as we... do not offer anything. Our Master's programs are of low quality... It hurts to say it, but I believe it's a waste of time. The most challenging question that senior students have is "where to apply?" The most challenging answer is, and I try to be as honest as I can, to inform what do we offer in our Master courses... Considering this reality, I tell them to go abroad... It would absolutely be unethical [to tell them the opposite]. It would be a total lack of responsibility. It would be unethical and non-professional... [sigh] as a professor I am devastated.
>
> (AG11, lecturer, public HEIs, Albania)

The last quote illustrates why the logic of appropriateness is better suited to explain a situation in which actors, instead of making utility-maximizing calculations, ask themselves "how does a person such as I, act in a situation such as this?"(March & Olsen, 2013).

c. Positive feedback

North (1990) argues that in politics causal links are very difficult to construct, and therefore even non-efficient policies may produce positive feedback. Similarly, Pierson (2004) has argued that information gets filtered into mental maps that reinforce actors' existing beliefs. As discussed in chapter 2, positive feedback is the main path-reproducing mechanism (Pierson, 2004; North, 1990). Accordingly, the shared understanding discussed above is hard to challenge with evidence, because information gets filtered out through mental maps that produce positive feedback for the Bologna reforms. For instance, five out of six of my informants insisted there were no costs in participating in Bologna, and in one case (AP06), a minister even distorted reality by claiming that Bologna does not use indicators to measure implementation. However, when I followed with a question: "what do wealthy nations gain from admitting Albania/Lithuania into this cooperation?" many of them replied: "talented students and qualified workforce", refusing the see the obvious connection between the two questions:

> **Question:** *What do think other countries benefit from Lithuania's participation in the Bologna process?*
>
> I can start with a very rational benefit: students. Yes, our students. Of course, they benefit students.
> ***Question**: Do you lose every student that they take?*
>
> As I said, it is not about winning or losing.
>
> (LG05, representative of universities in the national BFUG; Lithuania)

> ***Question:** What do you think the developed countries benefit from Albania's membership in Bologna?*
>
> Many of these countries have been interested in attracting human capital. They have attracted researchers and students. And I believe that that has helped them... They have concentrated human capital....
>
> ***Question**: and is it the case that their gains are a loss for Albania?*
>
> I do not think so... I believe that it has been an exchange, much more beneficial to us than to them.
>
> (P06, Albanian Minister)

At other times, actors present an overly optimistic view of reality, even if that means misinterpreting the data. A case in point is the answer given in the Lithuanian country report of 2012 (section E.2.a), where national rapporteurs are required to discuss "balanced mobility".

> Lithuania is a small country that is not far known and not very popular among those people who plan their studies in foreign countries... Nevertheless, the mobility in Lithuania is getting **more balanced**, as you can see in chart [below].
>
> (Lithuanian Bologna Process implementation report, 2012, p.13)

Chart 6.4 (below) is a reproduction of the chart mentioned in the report, but I have also added a line for the net balance of student mobility. As can be seen, this chart shows everything but that "mobility in Lithuania is getting more balanced". Indeed, the chart clearly shows the opposite, that a negative net balance has tripled from -568 in 2000 to -1'877 in 2008.

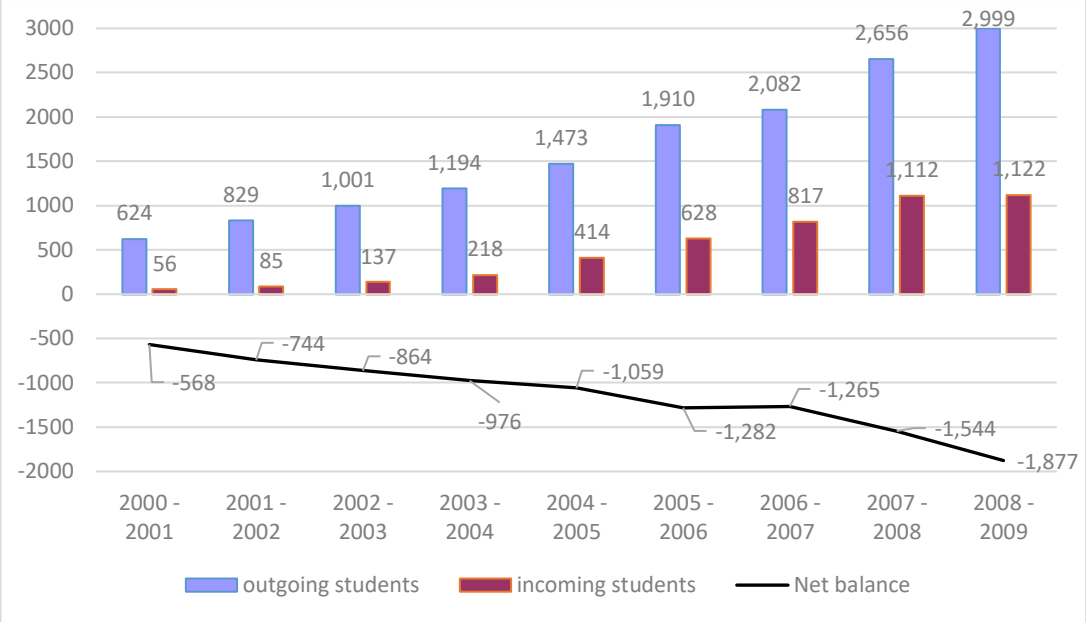


Chart nr. 6.4 – Originally shown in the 2012 country report. The net balance line is added

On the other hand, when confronted with evidence that this cooperation has failed to deliver what was initially expected (or promised), policy actors divert the blame. For instance, they blame the low birth rates for the decline in the number of students. However, as shown in Chapter 5, the decline in the tertiary enrolment rates as a percentage of all young people (e.g. 5.6% decline in Lithuania), cannot be explained by demographics alone:

> Actually, the measure [to deal with the low number of students] is taken on the national level: the merge of the universities, which is going all around Europe…If you take the [birth rate] worldwide, it is increasing but not in Europe, we are ageing.
> (LG05, representative of universities in the national BFUG, Lithuania)

> [The low inbound rate] is not a problem. Our main problem is demography, and demography depends not only on universities and education…
> (LP03, Lithuanian Minister)

At other times, national policy actors blame each other for not doing their homework, rather than the policy itself. This mentality resonates with the political culture expressed in the Soviet idiom "the water comes pure from the source but gets dirty on the way":

> I firmly believe that the best for us would have been to discuss which model to choose and then not make any Albanian style adjustments to that model.
> (AG09 – Rector of the oldest public university in Albania)

> ***Question**: Whose fault is it that Bologna did not manage to improve the quality of education?*
> Country's [fault]. The government, because you get the recommendations or documents and you [either] are following what is written there or not.
> (LG06, Student, LSS)

> In the conclusion of this paper, it is worthwhile to mention that the problems our country faces are not dictated by the Bologna Process in itself, or by the system itself. They are dictated and amplified by the Albanian reality, by the nature and the behaviour of the Albanian society, and above all by the main actors who "build" day by day the Bologna system in our country.
>
> (Treska & Canaj, 2013, p.674)

A case in point is the dispute about the length of studies, where the critics, instead of blaming the policy, claim that the ministry did not properly understand it, and reinvent another version of Bologna that is in line with their preferences. As discussed above, there was resistance in two faculties in Tirana to the implementation of the three-year degree cycle. I interviewed the most prominent voices among them, and, as illustrated in the following quotations, as well as in the newspapers of the time (Shqiptarja, 2013, October 11), they presented themselves as ardent supporters of Bologna, the European project and the Western education system (positioned at 1:10 and 1:9, in Chart 6.5, below). They assured me that the three-year bachelor's degree is a misinterpretation from the ministry, which is giving Bologna a bad name:

> I have no reason to be against Bologna, definitely…But this is not what Bologna is. Look, I think that many people reduced the Bologna process merely to the model [two-tier system, three plus two]. This is not the Bologna process.
>
> (AG15, dean of faculty, University of Tirana)

> That was... understandably good news that this decision was taken [to join Bologna]. It was sheer luck that Albania and the ministers of education signed the declaration. And naturally the Bologna process with the [European] integration... [pauses] So it was... it was a positive development. We were not concerned at all. Just that here the content of the declaration was misconstrued. The Bologna Declaration did not say the first level degree lasts 3 years.
>
> (AG13, dean of faculty, University of Tirana)

d. The dominant discourse

The positive feedback and the dominant discourse that legitimises Bologna and its policy agenda, has helped establish a powerful consensus that is very hard to challenge (see Ball, 2008; Foucault, 2000; Sander, 1998). As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of two-dimensionality of power holds that power can be exercised in preventing others from voicing criticism against the interests of more powerful actors (Barach & Baratz, 1970). However, evidence suggests that this consensus is so powerful that even prime ministers are not able

to speak against it. For instance, two former advisors of Albania's Prime Minister (PM), claimed during my interviews that behind closed doors the PM has been very critical of Bologna:

> **Question**: *What was the PM' position on Bologna, or the student mobility?*
>
> Look, the prime minister held the same opinion as I do. He did not like Bologna. And this was a mistake we made in Albania [to join Bologna], and there are better models, like the American one.
>
> (AP03, former advisor for education to the PM of Albania)

> **Question**: *Was the Prime Minister critical of Bologna?*
>
> It [Bologna] was there when we came [to power]... so, Albania had already joined it. It was not discussed...[pauses] **He was somehow sceptical**. He was a professor himself. He was a professor of medicine. So, if you told him that medicine would be turned into three plus two, I do not know how he would react.
>
> (AP06, former advisor for education to the PM of Albania)

However, in public the same PM has praised and supported this process wholeheartedly:

> The conference envisaged by the Bologna Agreement is the second deepest reform that has taken place in the last two centuries in higher education. Its purpose is crucial… Therefore, I want to assure you that we are very determined as a government to make every effort for deep and comprehensive reform to implement the standards required by the Bologna Agreement. We are convinced that **only through these standards** can our universities become shelters of freedom of thought…
>
> (The then PM of Albania, Mesuesi, 23.11.2005)

If these claims are true, they beg the question: what makes this process too powerful to be challenged even by the Prime Minister?

The first potential answer is that this policy agenda promotes decontextualized global solutions to national problems, which are presented as "best practices" (Ozga, 2018, p.746). These common practices are offered as reflecting scientific progress, and therefore to be developed outside of the political debate. This phenomenon, which is defined as 'cognitive consensus' by Grundmann and Stehr (2012), is best illustrated by the following quotation during my interview with one of the founders of Bologna (BP01 28.10.2019):

> We were three left-wing [politicians]... We **never discovered** what was the **political opinion** of [each] of us. Because we went further about the political discussions. When we mix political interests with some of these things, political interests prevail and how to say, *le jour,* The politics of the day. We were politicians all of us, MPs, political animals, totally, but [we thought] of the result for Europe.

> **Question:** *Since we are talking about the ideology of politics, what do you think Gramsci would say about the Bologna process?*[10]
>
> I don't know. It's difficult because he lived in a different period where circulation was very low. And nationality was very-very strong…he had a genial idea about the future. What we proposed was in the same direction of what Gramsci thought about the development of culture...
>
> (BP01, former minister, founder of Bologna)

Thus, these standardising practices grow to represent progress and modernity, and are often portrayed as part of the "evolution", which means that the debate is not framed as being among various sides of the political spectrum, but as being between the past and the future.

> We have to very clearly recognize that every young person these days can choose any university in the world…**this is an evolution of the mindset**, because all parents now that have kids, I think they don't expect that all of them will study in Lithuania…just because previously we had no possibility to go away, so now we realise that our kids have **a better choice**.
>
> (LP01, Lithuanian minister)

As a corollary, opposing this "modernisation project" increases the political and social costs for the critics. Very often promoters of these ideas do not shy away from portraying critics as regressive, as 'Don Quixote'-like figures who cling on to a distant past that no longer exists. This binary view is in line with the political legacy of the previous regime, which was based on the mentality of limiting people's choices to "with us or against us". Back then, adopting the latter position often came with severe consequences, including imprisonment or even death:

> Some peasants say "yes, at [the past] time it was better, you could steal some grain from the farm and feed your pigs". But I don't know any person who says that in terms of universities…In academia, we have some nationalist opinions, and they argue that "the EU is the same as the Soviet Union, and we lose our identity". They use all these negative trends [of emigration], and they say "look at this brain drain!"
>
> (LG03, President of University Rectors' Conference, Lithuania)
>
> Professors continued to preserve the *status quo* and their subjects with conservatism and chivalric attitudes[11]. Besides, there were conceptual and cultural problems. But you know that the Theory of Evolution predicts that only those who manage to adapt, survive ☺ …Chivalric academics, who *did not want* or *did not know* how to adapt held their systems back[12].
>
> (AP07, e-mail correspondence, 09.09.2020, emphasis on the original)

[10] I asked this question because of the political ideology of the BP01, and because he/she had told me earlier that he/she admired Antonio Gramsci.

[11] In Albanian this term is used to make references to the renowned book character, "Don Quixote" from Miguel de Cervantes, who had lost touch with reality and was living in a distant past.

[12] They actually used an Albanian idiom which refers to drill commands, when soldiers in a parade stop and count steps without moving forward.

Moreover, a common frame of reference is developed, and new terminology enters the discourse to express these ideas through a "global policy speak" (Novoa, 2002). For instance, old Albanian words like "*emigrim*" or "*kurbet*", which carry a long history and painful memories, are replaced with "*mobilitete*", which is a word that many people do not properly understand (it is not recognised in the Albanian dictionary). Similarly, the word "*pengesa*" is replaced by "*barriera*", which seems to be a version of "barriers". However, public officials have been quick to employ these terms in formal settings and official documents. This behaviour follows a familiar pattern developed in the previous regime, where the official discourse was organised around slogans prepared by the party, which were unexamined and unchallenged.

In a similar fashion, actors use the language of powerful actors to legitimise these processes (see Steiner-Khamsi, 2012), although these terms are often empty of substance and disconnected from the processes they are supposed to represent. To illustrate, only 3 of my informants chose "emigration", as a word that represents Bologna, but 45 of them (79.6%) *agree* or *strongly agree* that this process has made it easier for Albanian/Lithuanian students to study abroad. On the other hand, critics are stripped of the vocabulary to speak against these processes without looking out of date or sounding regressive:

> You have to give students opportunities to study abroad [otherwise] it is against the values
>
> ***Question:*** *Which values?*
>
> [Pauses to think] How to say...it's aaaaa... the value to choose how you want to work, how you want to study, because the main thing is that other countries which are participating in the Bologna Process can actually move, those students can move, and in Lithuania… we cannot participate in mobility, so in this case, it is this kind of value...
>
> (LG04, President of LSS)

The second answer to the above question reflects what Pierson (2004) calls "short-sightedness" of politicians, by which he means that it is not in their political interest to carry out reforms that will bring benefits in the future, while incurring costs in the present. Similarly, Klein and Marmor's (2011, p.984), argument that politicians' main concerns are to gain office and to stay in office, is illustrated by the following quotation from a Lithuanian minister:

> Yes [universities] were very powerful and very resistant against any reforms… They had many people in [the] Parliament who were working in universities and it was very difficult to pass such a law. For example, I made a lot of reforms, but… **people from my party were saying "who will elect us after your reform?"**
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian Minister)

Moreover, as the process progresses further, the costs of changing course increase, as one action leads to another taken in the same direction (Feeney & Hogan, 2017). That is why the loyalty of these countries to remain in Bologna has to be interpreted through the lens of path dependence, as indicated by the following exchange during my interviews in Albania:

> **Question**: *If the Prime Minister was critical about Bologna, then why did Albania not exit from this cooperation?*
> Well, there are some political concerns. Entering was easy but leaving is difficult.
>
> (AP03, Adviser for Education of the Prime Minister of Albania)
>
> **Question**: *You are suggesting that you did not like the three-year bachelor's degree, and neither did the PM. Then, why didn't you change it?*
>
> The process had taken its course.
>
> **Question**: *Do you mean that you could not stop the process?*
>
> The process had already started. And we thought that it could consolidate on the way… [Changing path] has a cost... a very bureaucratic cost... with diplomas, it brings up a variety of diplomas… It would be dreadful to manage....
>
> (AP06, Albanian minister of education)

It is unclear to what degree these costs are real, for there is no evidence of cost-benefit analysis taking place in either of the countries. For instance, an empirical example is the reverse of the first-level Law degree in Albania, which in 2015 changed again from three years into an integrated diploma of five years (Parliament of Albania, 2015, July). Stakeholders from the law faculty of Tirana University, interviewed by me, argue that changing path has not been as difficult as it is argued by the policy elite quoted above (interviews with AG15, dean of faculty and AG19, academic, member of the group of experts who prepared the legal reform). However, the conversation around these alleged costs enters the daily discourse and often goes unchallenged, acting as a self-fulfilling prophecy (see Merton, 1968). For example, during my conversation with the Albanian representative in the BFUG, when I asked what would happen if their country did not participate in Bologna, they argued that it would not benefit international funds. But when I brought the case of Kosovo, which is not in Bologna, and still participates in these projects, he/she could not come with a convincing answer.

In this context, unlike those whose preferences are altered, some key players retain their critical position on Bologna, but refrain from speaking up against the ruling consensus, for they anticipate social and political costs. However, contrary to Lukes' (2005) prediction, powerful actors are not prevented from defending their ideas in public, however they themselves get entrenched in a policy consensus that encourages them to self-censor, and not use the available space to speak up again the ruling consensus. An illustrative example is the following minister who in public defends policies that he/she criticises in private:

His/her quote during the interview on 22.02.2018:

> Just the structure of Bologna, although the law does not stipulate it strictly, is implemented in most of the countries in the two-tier system, three plus two... but today I am convinced that the three plus two model is not adequate for Albania.
>
> **Question**: *Professor, are you thinking it now, or did you have these thoughts even when you introduced the law on higher education?*
>
> I have had these [thoughts] earlier… I have my reserves about the three-years degree, and **today I think, as I thought in 2010**, that we should have had a four-year bachelor's degree.
>
> (AP06, Albanian minister)

His/her quote in 2010 during an event as minister of education[13]:

> Despite the conflicts ... caused by the implementation of the Bologna system in our country, the **transition from the 4-year degrees to the three-plus two is a great achievement** and one of the conditions to stand side by side with European universities.

6.4 Interests and preferences

As discussed in chapter 2, in this thesis actors are not excluded from having interests, but, as discussed above, these interests are 'constituted by, and constitutive of, power relations' (Carter, Freeman & Lawn 2015, p. 8), and underpinned by a shared understanding. Some authors interpret the actors' preferences in the light of their material benefits. For instance, Pavlovaite (2003, p.248) explain the split between supporters and critics of the EU integration, with their status as winners or losers of the transition process. She argues that on the one hand are EU supporters, who tend to be urban, young, well-educated, and financially better off citizens; on the other are Eurosceptics who tend to be old, poor, rural and less educated.

[13] This quote is an excerpt from an interview given by the minister to the media. The newspaper issue is in the documents list, but I am not referring to it here so as not to disclose the identity of the minister.

Similarly, using survey data from ten post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, Tucker et al., (2002), found that by the time Lithuania joined Bologna, there was a positive correlation between the benefits a social group was receiving from the transition process, and their support for the EU membership and the free market economy. However, even in these studies, while the winners tend to be more supportive of the Europeanisation agenda, the data suggest that the losing groups still support this process. Hence, interests matter, but interests alone cannot explain the whole picture of actors' behaviour towards Europeanisation, because interests are not pre-political. They are socially constructed based on what is perceived appropriate for their role and identity (March & Olsen, 2013; 2009; Kauppi, 2010; Goldmann, 2005), which sometimes makes them act against what is considered as their material interest.

To that end, as discussed in Chapter 3, I asked my informants to use a 10-item scale to express their attitudes towards the EU and the education model Western vis-à-vis Soviet (however they define them). In line with what was discussed in chapter 5, most of my informants are displayed in the top right corner of the chart (blue square) of Chart 6.5 (below), indicating high levels of support for Europe and the Western Education model. In light of that information, I will now discuss the interests and preferences of the key actors.

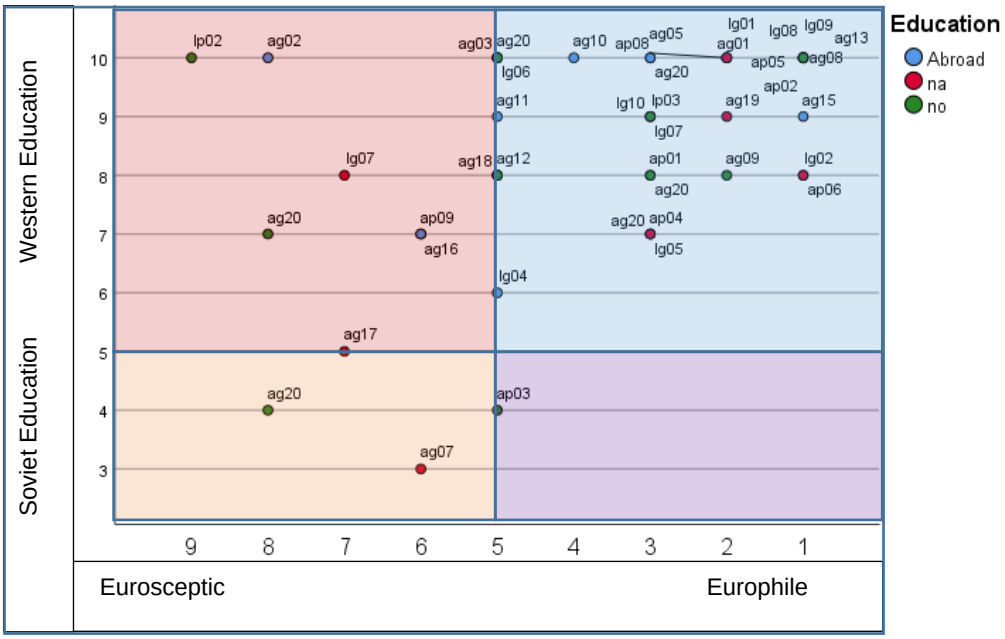


Chart 6.5 – How my research informants position themselves towards the EU and their preferences towards education systems

a. Policymakers

Participation in international organisations gives greater access to policymakers. For instance, Pavlovaite, (2003, p.245) argues that participation in European forums has given Lithuania the opportunity to raise international awareness for its problems and get help in solving them. However, as discussed in the next chapter, these countries are not using these forums to raise awareness of their problems. Instead, they use these activities to overstate their "achievements" in implementing an agenda that does not represent their interests. Furthermore, even at a personal level, Albanian ministers do not attend several of the Bologna ministerial conferences, which are among the most important international forums.

On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter 2, some authors argue that states adhere to international cooperation, as a way to shift the blame to supranational entities for policies that would otherwise face resistance back home (see Jacquot & Woll, 2004; Radaelli 2000; Cortell & Davis, 1996). Accordingly, Hoareau (2012) suggests that the four ministers founded Bologna to overcome domestic resistance to national reforms.

However, empirical evidence shows that actors from Lithuania and Albania refrain from blaming Bologna even when doing so would be in their interest. To illustrate, when I asked one minister, who claimed to have always been against Bologna, why he/she introduced a law that went against his/her preferences, international commitments were not blamed. Instead, the facts were twisted so that domestic HEIs were said to have misconstrued the law:

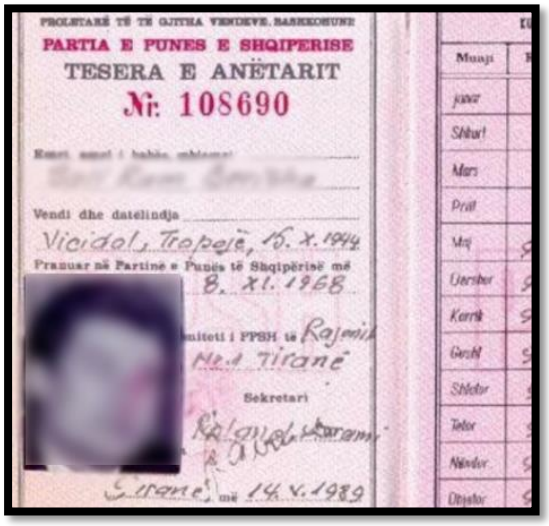
> The law of the time [2007-2010] stipulated that the bachelor's degree lasts not less than three years...
>
> **Question**: *Are you saying that universities could apply for the three-year bachelor's degree, had they wanted to?*
>
> They could have done that. Nobody dared to. Nobody thought about it. Nobody tried it…because the biggest fear of [our] universities is that they might lose students… and if the bachelor's degree lasts one year longer in one university, students might not choose it.
>
> (AP06, Albanian minister)

However, the fact is that when the law nr.9120 of 28.07.2003 stipulated that "duration of studies…is not less than three years" (art. 9), the majority of HEIs retained the old four-year degree. It was the law nr.9741 of 2007, introduced when AP06 was working for the

government, that forced universities (some of them against their will) to switch to three-year degrees, by stipulating that the "normal duration of the [bachelor's degree] is 3 academic years" (Art.26). It continued further with the legal amendments Nr.10307 of 2010, introduced by AP06, now a minister, which reiterated that "the first study cycle has 180 credits…and their normal duration is 3 academic years" (Art.15/1.1b). Thus, it is unlikely that these countries joined Bologna to delegate responsibility for unpopular reforms, which they would have introduced anyway. Indeed, actors would rather blame each other, just to keep Bologna intact.

While blaming Bologna and/or the Europeanisation project is not a viable alternative in countries like Albania and Lithuania, being associated with the West gives politicians legitimacy to govern (see Stein, 2015; Pevehouse, 2002; Hurd, 1999). As discussed in chapter 5, in both countries there is low trust in the national institutions and high levels of support for the EU. For instance, only 34% of Lithuanians trust their government (OECD, 2015), and Albanian citizens trust the EU institutions (59%) more than their national government (41%) (EC, 2014). Therefore, it might be reasonable to assume that the ministers benefitted (or expected to benefit) from the "European brand" of Bologna. That may explain why in Chart 6.5 (above) none of the politicians from both countries indicates a preference for the Soviet Education system (purple square), although during the interviews several of them paid compliments to the education system that existed "during their time".

Indeed, studies have shown that the former communist nomenklatura of in the Eastern European countries, have found various ways to remain in power, often by reinventing themselves as supporters of the European integration and free market economy (Matonyte, 2014; Kryshtanovskara, & White, 1996). Thus, it is not uncommon for politicians who have carried the "burden" of having a past that stretches back to the previous regime, to present themselves as


PROLETARË TË TË GJITHA VENDEVE, BASHKOHUNI

PARTIA E PUNES E SHQIPERISE

TESERA E ANËTARIT

Nr. 108690

Vendi dhe datëlindja

Vicidol, Tropojë, 15. X. 1944

Pranuar në Partinë e Punës të Shqipërisë më

8. XI. 1968

Rajonit

Nr.1 Tiranë

Sekretari

Tiranë më 14. V. 1989

Muaji

Janar

Shkurt

Mars

Prill

Maj

Qershor

Korrik

Gusht

Shtator

Tetor

Nëntor

Dhjetor

Image 6.6 Communist party membership card

ardent supporters of Bologna, as part of the European integration process. For instance, the PM mentioned above, has often been mocked for his disconnection with European identity, due to his lack of foreign language skills, and has been politically attacked for his role during the previous regime. Image 6.6, is a facsimile of his communist party membership card, which is often brought up by his opponents in political debates. Thus, it was in his political interest to present a public persona that was as far as possible from the Soviet past, and as close as possible to the European model of education.

Secondly, AP01, the Minister who submitted Albania's membership application[14], was often called "commissar Memo" by his political opponents, who wanted to remind him of his political past and to draw parallels with a fictional character of an outdated official of the communist party (Agolli, 1969). In this context, AP01 identifies himself as a Europhile and an enthusiastic supporter of the Western Education model (see Chart 6.5 above). This tendency can also be observed from a simple analysis of the discourse he employs to explain and justify Albania's commitment to Bologna. For instance, the word count of his interview (12.02.2018), reveals that "Europe" (or "European") is the second most used noun (33 times) after Bologna (Chart 6.7, below). Similarly, in a speech he delivered as a minister where he discussed the developments in higher education in Albania (04.12.2004), "Europe" (or "European") was one the most frequently used nouns (27 times), after "education", "students" and "Bologna".

On the other hand, it is in the minister's interest to fulfil the expectations of their constituency. As discussed in chapter 2, other people's expectations often have a direct impact on the preferences of actors (Sydow et al., 2009), and the Europeanisation process discussed in chapter 5, has helped shape expectations of the public and interest groups.

[14] I have observed these political accusations through the media, and in the documents list there are two articles that support this claim. However, I am not referencing them here, to not disclose their identity, as an ethical commitment to my informants, albeit total anonymity is impossible in this case.



Chart 6.7 – interview with AP01 on 12.02.2018. The word cloud is produced with Nvivo

Consequently, there has been strong political pressure on the minister to bring the country closer to Europe, and Bologna has been widely perceived as part of the integration process. To that end, the minister used Bologna membership to score political points, by underplaying its costs and by overstating the role played by his administration (Mesuesi, 24.09.2003).

To become a member of the Bologna Process one country had to participate in the European Cultural Convention of the CoE, and be willing to implement the Bologna commitments once they became a member (Berlin communique, 2003, p.8).



MËSUESI

BIBLIOTEKA KOMBËTARE TIRANË

E MERKURE
24 shtator 2003
Viti XLIII i Botimit
Nr.29 (2303)
Çmimi: 25 lekë
Numri i parë:
1 shtator 1961

ARSIMORE -KULTURORE Botim i Ministrisë së Arsimit dhe Shkencës

U rritën me 8% pagat e mësuesve

Lexo në faqen 2

rateşija e zhvillimit të arsimit rauniversitar 2003-2013

U mblodh Grupi Qendror

Dedej, Stavri Llambiri, Luan Omari, Zyher Beci, Bajram Kruja, Musa Kraja, Natesha Hodo, Garufa Noti, sekretari i përgjithshëm Agim Minxhozi, Vito Çela, Ilia Paluka. Nga të gjithë diskutantët u vlerësua puna e madhe e bërë për hartimin e

Shqipëria pranohet anëtare me të drejta të plota në Procesin e Bolonjës

-Konferencë shtypi e ministrit të Arsimit dhe Shkencës, prof. dr. Luan Memushi-

Image 6.8 – The official gazette. “Albania, is accepted as a full member of the Bologna Process” 24.09.2003

This low bar has been passed by virtually every country that has shown interest in the process, including Albania and its neighbours that applied the same year. However, in Albania, rather than a commitment to embark on a difficult path of reforms, Bologna membership was promoted as a well-deserved achievement for the EU integration process, which was crowned with a seat for the minister, among the big boys.

> We cannot ignore such an important event… only 7 months after we submitted our request [for membership], after all the developments of reforms in our higher education to date were reviewed and evidenced, the Conference of Education **Ministers of European countries**… decided to accept Albania as a full member of the Bologna Process… and **invited the Minister of Education to sit among the member states** of the Bologna Process… This membership is not accidental [but] it is the outcome of a reforming process in our higher education that has lasted for years… **we had achieved some standards,** some main objectives, **without which we could not have been accepted** in the Bologna process… [Therefore] I consider it a privilege of the moment that I happened to be in this duty, to fulfil, within the European integration framework, in a more or less commendable amount of time, the integration of our higher education system to the Bologna Process.
>
> (AP01, 24.09.2003, emphasis added)

The sentiment of this public discourse is summarised in the following quote, by one of the students of the time, who was leading the Albanian Students Government:

> [The Signing of the Bologna Declaration] was an expression of hope that something positive would happen... The government used this propaganda... "Just wait and see how well it will be"...
>
> (AG02, former leader of the ASG)

Thirdly, a key role in policymaking is played by the action elite, which manages to persuade the policymakers and the publics that they serve best to their interests. These actors have benefitted personally, including from high consultancy fees, better social status and more opportunities to advance their careers. To illustrate, public officials who have played a key role as liaison between national and international levels, have used their ability to translate international policies into the national context, to become indispensable for the institution. Their know-how and rich international network have ensured them better job security within the institutional framework where they operate. For instance, the officials who deal with Bologna (e.g. AP04; AP07), have enjoyed a high level of job stability that is unusual for a country like Albania, which is accused of having a public administration that is plagued by corruption and nepotism (TI, 2020; Shqip, 2014, March 28).

Similarly, experts and officials that represent countries in the BFUG wear several hats, including that of the expert who is commissioned for consultancy (see Lawn & Lingard, 2015; 2002, on Education Policy Elites). Consequently, it is difficult to distinguish what takes priority when their personal interests' conflict with those of the country they represent.

> In the BFUG some representatives come in the name of their country but are not part of the ministry. They are experts. And I am not quite sure if they transmit in the BFUG purely the voice of their government. Not to mention that on some occasions they have a personal interest... I have the impression that they are paid for this job. And when they are not, as experts, they put their names on the EU experts' roster and are simultaneously paid for the expertise etc…[They] are normally in some sort of a conflict of interest, because they are paid by...how to say, paid by funds coming from these bodies, against which they might have to speak up. Do you know what I mean?
>
> (AP04, country representative in the BFUG)

b. Interest groups

It was discussed in chapter 2 that domestic interest groups use the state as a vehicle to advance their international interests. Moravcsik (2008), goes as far as arguing that if they did not have enough trans-border interests, states would lack the motivation to engage in international cooperation. Hence, I discuss here the interests and preferences of stakeholders involved in the policy domain of higher education.

The first group is composed of university leaders, whose interests have been harmed by higher outward mobility. As discussed in chapter 5, both countries have lost many students, including their best and brightest, which has had a detrimental impact on domestic HEIs, many of which have closed study programs, or, indeed, the entire institution. Consequently, many academics and university leaders have lost their jobs. Furthermore, private HEIs in Albania have lost 25% of tuition fees following the introduction of shorter bachelor's degree.

On the other hand, this international cooperation has created new opportunities for the leaders of the existing HEIs, as well as for those who were planning to establish new ones. Thus, facilitating the international mobility of students created an advantageous environment for the establishment of International Branch Campuses (IBC) of universities abroad, or the emergence of new joint degrees delivered in partnerships between national and foreign HEIs. For instance, as discussed in chapter 5, one of the first private HEIs in Lithuania was

established in 1999 by a Norwegian university (ism.lt, 2020; LG05), and offers dual degrees. Similarly, the first private HEIs in Albania came from foreign initiatives: one IBC of an American university, and one Italian university, which issue joint degrees with HEIs abroad (Mesuesi, 26.01.2005; UNYT, 2020). The latter is often used by Italian students to circumvent the university admission process back home, by enrolling in this institution and transferring their studies to Italy, which is made possible only by the Bologna agenda:

> This university where I presently contribute was set up and operates only on the basis of the international value of our degrees… [Our Italian students] come to Albania because the Italian state retains a system of limited admission quotas... Hence, **these are students who applied [in Italy]**, most of them, **but were not admitted** to [Italian] universities.
>
> (AP07, executive staff, private HEI in Albania)

Moreover, HEIs with international ties are not the only ones benefiting from the facilities of student mobility promoted by this policy agenda. National private HEIs too have used Bologna to brand themselves as European (Telegraf, 2007, July 05). Emphasising compliance with Bologna is used by private HEIs to indicate higher quality of studies, given the public perception of Europe discussed in chapter 5. On the other hand, there is a strong desire to emigrate among young people in both countries. More than 30% of students in Lithuania (Dovile & Ruta, 2007), and 63% in Albania (Cela & Kamberi, 2019) plan to emigrate after their studies. Thus, by claiming international recognition, private HEIs manage to increase the value of their diplomas. A case in point is the poster presented in the Image 6.10 that emphasises the message: “diplomas recognised in Europe”. This poster, which is produced by the PR office where I was working in 2010, was prepared, because our data showed that students were concerned whether their diplomas would have any value abroad.



Image 6.10: "Degree recognised in Europe and the USA"…our students who continue their Master studies in Europe…are not required to give extra exams. Private HEI, 2010

It is interesting to note that this concern was also expressed among students who did not have immediate plans to emigrate, probably indicating that emigration is also a backup plan.

Thus, universities have both costs and benefits from Bologna, but they prioritise their interests based on what they deem as appropriate for their identity and the role they play in society:

> Our students have pursued their master's studies at Oxford, Harvard, London School of Economics, etc. After bachelor's or master's studies [at our university]… there is no need for additional exams [to study abroad].
>
> **Question**: *Is it an economic loss for you when your students choose to pursue their studies abroad instead of continuing them at your university?*
>
> Look. There is a big debate between developed and underdeveloped countries, but there is always a direction in the end. And that direction is this: We would very much prefer students… of the periphery, or less developed countries, to study in developed countries, or the most renowned universities, globally top-ranked. It is part of our success. It is not part of our failure or part of our problem…
>
> (AG08, president of a private HEI in Albania)

The second group is composed of academics working in public and private HEIs. As discussed in chapter 5, the steady decline in the number of students has reduced the number of academic staff in both countries. Furthermore, academics in private HEIs that rely on tuition fees have seen their remuneration reduced due to the fall in the number of students (AG21). Nevertheless, the majority of academics have been in favour of Bologna, *inter alia* because it provides them with opportunities to travel abroad, participate in international projects, and join international networks (Interviews with AG02,6,7, 17,18; AP06,09; LG01,02,03,05). Moreover, as discussed in chapter 5, academics have benefitted from the socialisation process, as well as other incentives from the international organisations that promote Bologna's agenda:

> **Question**: *What did you expect from Bologna membership?*
>
> First of all, the first thing that came to everyone's mind was mobility... Because our country was kind of closed for researchers, academics, etc. [...] It was very difficult for academics to establish connections, to travel, to do research, to open up, and to disseminate their research... So, I think that was the main reasoning.
>
> (LG05, representative of academics in the National BFUG)

> As I said, there were a lot of expectations related to the freedom of movement: going abroad, getting access to the infrastructure, to the new ideas, etc.
>
> (LG02, Dean of Faculty, Public University)

However, while the preferences of academics seem to be shaped by the cognitive consensus discussed above, the time-distance between reforms and their impact, makes it difficult to demonstrate a causal link. Hence, many academics could not see the costs of these reforms until they became visible and tangible as part of the new reality.

The third groups are students and their parents. Most of my informants (79.6%) believe that Bologna has made it easier for students to study abroad. This is seen as a positive development by many students who now are presented with a broader international offer that allows them to make better choices for their education and boost their prospective career:

> A medical student who wants to leave has many reasons to do it. First of all, if you want to stay in touch with empirical and complete knowledge, you should absolutely take the initiative to leave, because **the chances are that here you will lag behind.**
>
> (AG20b, President of a students council, public HEI, focus group participant in Albania)

However, while ten to twenty per cent of students manage to study abroad, there is a larger group that is left behind, who may indirectly pay the costs, including higher tuition fees and lower quality of studies in domestic HEIs, as discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

Furthermore, there are other social costs for students who do not succeed in fulfilling the expectation of studying abroad. As discussed in chapter 4, by promoting outward mobility, Bologna has turned it into a social norm (see Petzold & Peter, 2015). As a corollary, societies in both countries begin to see studying at home as a failure. Having lived most of my adult life in Albania, I have observed first-hand the social pressure and the glass ceiling that ambitious young people face when they “miss” an education abroad. This sentiment is illustrated in the following quotations from interviews with young people in both countries:

> **Question:** *Did you study abroad?*
> Nope
>
> **Question:** *Why not?*
> [seems uncomfortable with the question] Aaa...Actually, I was involved in the student movement, so I didn't have a lot of time to go abroad...
>
> **Question:** *If you could study in the UK, would you do it?*
> Yeah, of course… because I think the quality of universities in England, in this case, is much better than in Lithuania, so the main reason would be because of the quality of education.
>
> (LG04, President of the Lithuanian Students Union)

> Since secondary school I have always wanted to go abroad, because I think that... for a person with certain skills or values, it is very difficult to have here a certain kind of career… That's also this thing that we mentioned before, that at least **if you studied abroad, you're seen differently** by the employers here [other focus group participants node in agreement with her statement]
>
> (AG20a, a representative of students in the senate, public HEI, focus group participant in Albania)

Nevertheless, as evidence suggests, the majority of students and their parents are in favour of higher outward mobility. One of the main reasons is related to the political culture, which for a long time has excluded citizens from decision-making, hollowing out their civic responsibilities for the situation in the country. Therefore, many people are vulnerable to the adoption of quick fixes to long-standing problems which they do not expect to be solved anytime soon. Faced with an education system that is not getting better, many parents choose to educate their children abroad, including those who are in charge of winning the international competition for students (interview with LG01). Moreover, a recent study with Albanian students abroad has found that 75% of them came from families with tertiary educated parents, vis-à-vis 47% of students in Albania (King & Gadeshi, 2020). Similarly, more than two-thirds of my informants, who were parents that belonged to the country's elite, had chosen to educate their children abroad (appendix 3.13). They understood the costs that high outward mobility incurred to their country, but they did not seem ready to make personal sacrifices. To illustrate, Chart 6.11 (below), shows that 79.5% of my informants, agreed with the statement "If I could choose, I would like me and/or my children to study abroad".

However, fewer respondents (51.1%) believed that the country benefits if the most talented students study abroad, and only 25%, agreed that the government should encourage students to study abroad. In other words, while the majority of them want to educate their children abroad, they would also prefer that other parents did not do the same.

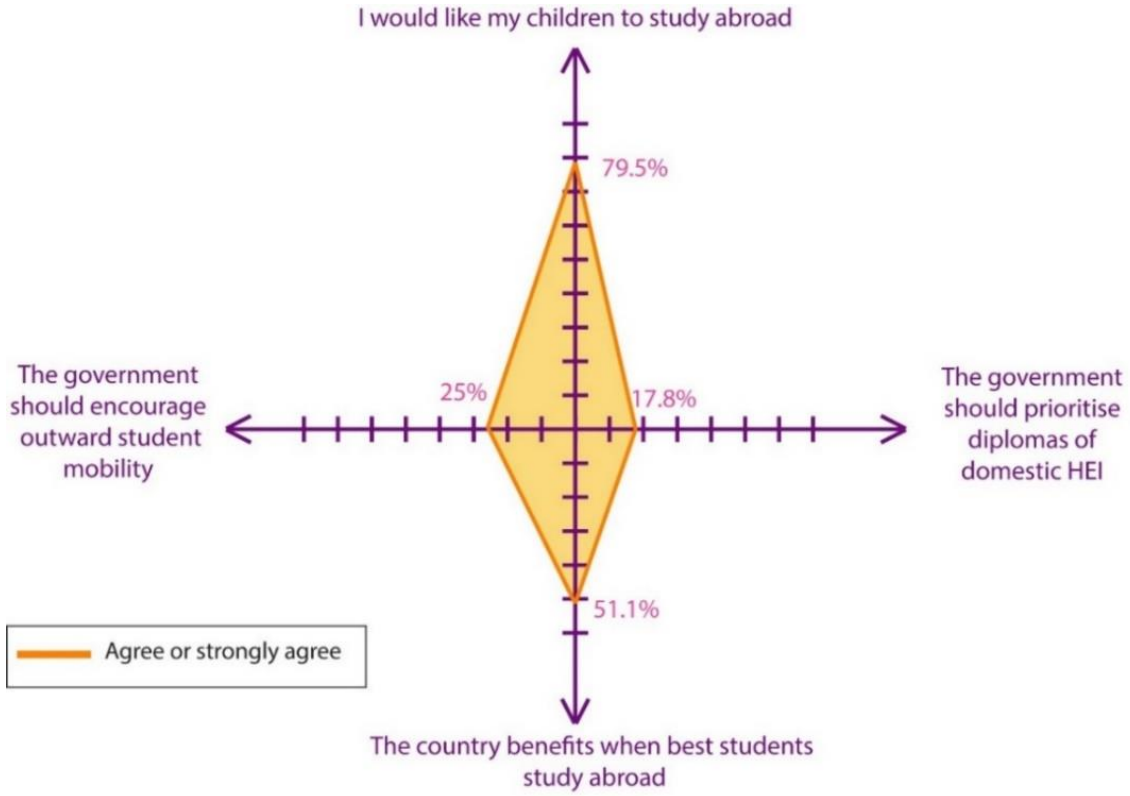


Chart 6.11 Responses to the questionnaire administered with my informants

Through the in-depth interviews I explored further how these actors navigate their professional and parental responsibilities, and how they respond to the conflict between competing roles. As the following exchange illustrates, I found that providing the best education for their children took priority, and they understood that it could not be achieved in domestic HEIs:

> I have two [children]… one studied in [one EU country] and the other [one] in the UK, and [he/she] came back, and [he/she] paid some fees for the UK universities.
>
> **Question**: *May I assume that you are a successful parent in sending your children abroad, but as a university rector, not so much in keeping them here?*
>
> I am successful in keeping my [children]. My senior [child] who is [abroad]… is completely convinced that [he/she] will come back… The second [child who] graduated in [the UK]…has very good income [and] is successful, and I would say that we did not help them too much.
>
> **Question**: *But as a university rector don't you feel like you should have had these successful students studying at your university?*
>
> I would like to, but there are different families, and I think that many things come from the family. Because me and my [partner] we travelled, we had fellowships we stayed [abroad]. And we showed that we come back… [O]ur children saw that you can come back and be successful.
>
> (LG03, President of the Conference of Rectors)

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, I identify the key players that operate at the national level and are responsible for the loser's behaviour towards the Bologna process. I analyse the way in which they are organised and their power to influence the policy domain of higher education. I argue that although the ministers are formally in charge of leading this process, their powers are limited by various actors involved in the process and several path-reproducing mechanisms.

The power relations are discussed in the framework of the political culture that defines what is deemed as appropriate behaviour, by focusing the legacy of the previous regime, symptoms of which are still visible in the way institutions operate and actors rationalise their actions.

I also discuss the shared understanding, and the mental maps that actors apply to filter out information and produce positive feedback, even when this policy is not delivering the expected outcomes. I argue that many actors see Bologna as a policy learning process, and therefore, instead of complaining about it, they use it as a model to assess their progress. Consequently, information that could be used to criticise Bologna is translated into reasons to implement it further, while criticising national actors for inept implementation of it.

Furthermore, I argue that although some actors see the negative impact of outward mobility, there is a powerful *common sense* that encourages them to treat it as natural phenomenon, which governments can do little to influence. Additionally, a dominant discourse has established a cognitive consensus that is very difficult to challenge, even by powerful actors, such as ministers and even the prime minister. That is done by increasing social and political costs for going against the ruling consensus, acting as a path-reproducing mechanism that discourages actors from considering *exit* from this cooperation.

In the last part of the chapter I discuss actors' interests and preferences, which are understood in the social context where they are developed. For instance, the interests of politicians to appear as pro-European is understood in the context where Europe is widely perceived as an aspirational model to be followed, and everything related to it is regarded as being more developed and of better quality. I argue that although social groups might be both gaining and

losing from Bologna, how they navigate and prioritise their interests, is what elucidates the losers' behaviour that is seen as 'irrational' from the perspective of rational choice theories. However, while path-reproducing mechanisms may have limited the power of actors to exit Bologna, it should have also increased the incentive to *voice* discontent at the international level. In the following chapter I discuss why that has not happened, by focusing on key events that demonstrate how national actors interact on the international stage and how the international policy agenda travels, gets mediated and translated into the local context.

Chapter 7 – Playing with the big boys

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Day 1: Wednesday, 23rd May 2018, 4.30 pm, Sorbonne University, Paris. 235

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7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I discussed the policy agenda of Bologna and showed that it does not represent the interests of the losers. I also explained the social structures, norms and processes that enabled such a decision. Here, I make use of political ethnography to explain why the losers do not voice grievances. In doing this, I change the style of the thesis towards offering illuminative vignettes of aspects of actors' behaviour, practices and processes that illustrate their understandings and positioning in relation to the Bologna process. These vignettes seek to build on my earlier analysis, offering a better illustration of my arguments (Hughes & Huby, 2012; Barter & Renold, 2010). The purpose is to provide to reader with an "insider view" of the political community of the European Higher Education Area.

Thus, I focus first on the Paris ministerial conference of 2018, to offer a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of how these countries are represented on the international stage where they agree to commitments that they do not want. I start by analysing the debates in setting the agenda of the conference, and the preparation for it, starting from the selection of the delegation. Then I move to the events of the conference and the interaction of the delegates in the international community. While observing in action the soft governing tools that promote policy compliance through comparison and socialization, I identify external and internal obstacles that prevent actors from challenging the ruling consensus, and discuss how the losers are silenced, and silence themselves, in international arenas.

Then, the discussion moves to the conference in Vilnius in June 2018 to unpack the way in which Bologna policies travel from the international stage into the national context. I discuss the process through which actors take international messages 'home', translate and promote them as de-contextualized solutions to common policy problems.

I pay attention to what Thrift (2000) calls "little things", which are often missed by conventional research and are overlooked by many students of world politics. To that end, I use pictures and quotations, as illustrative, to provide the reader with a full and vivid picture of the perspectives and voices of the participants.

7.2 Before the Conference - Agenda-setting

In the period between two ministerial conferences, Bologna is coordinated by the Secretariat, but the most important decisions as taken by the BFUG, which is composed of representatives of its 48 members, as well as consultative members, partners and experts (EHEA, 2020b). The shared agenda is decided in the ministerial conferences, but the BFUG prepares everything, which makes the conference often look like a formality (see below).

As discussed in chapter 4, imbalanced mobility represents conflicting interests, because, while being beneficial to the winners, it has ramifications for the losers. Thus, when this issue was picked up by the Bologna Working Group (WG) Mobility 2009 – 2012, which prepared the Mobility Strategy for the EHEA, there was no agreement on even defining imbalanced mobility, let alone on finding a solution to it. Thus, due to internal debates in the WG meetings, the following definition was removed from the final version of the strategy (see Appendix 3.14):

> We refer to imbalanced student mobility if the difference between incoming and outgoing students is more than 25 per cent of the higher value.
> (WG Mobility, Working Paper, 11th March 2011, art.3 para 1)

However, the same meeting reached a consensus on putting forward several ideas about this topic, such as that: "Even if there are specific imbalances[15], mobility itself is good and therefore should not be restrained", or that "Regulations which limit human mobility are very dangerous." (Final report by the WG Mobility, 2012, p.4). And, to put priorities straight, it was emphasised in the report of the meeting that:

> Higher mobility is the key priority, while secondarily looking for a more and/or better balanced mobility.
> (minutes of the 4th meeting of the WG Mobility, Berlin, issued on 01.07.2011)

Hence, the attempt to tackle imbalanced mobility as a collective was not successful, and the mobility strategy considered it as a private matter of concerned governments:

> If the findings show greater imbalances over longer periods of time, the **governments concerned** should jointly investigate the causes, consider carefully the advantages and disadvantages of the specific imbalance and seek solutions if deemed necessary.
> (Mobility Strategy 2020, for the EHEA, 2012, art. 3, para 4, emphasis added)

[15] Note the use of the unusual term "imbalanced" as a way to avoid the word "unbalanced" which carries a sense of something faulty.

This formulation replaced the following sentence that existed in the previous versions and which had created the opportunity to tackle imbalanced mobility at the ministerial level:

> **If required, dealing with the matter** at a European level **under the Bologna ministerial conferences** might also be considered.
> (WG Mobility, Working Paper, 11th March 2011, art.3, para 7, emphasis added)

Ironically, the same strategy that promotes collective action on increasing outward mobility, advises governments to deal individually with the outcomes of this common policy agenda.

> No serious effort has been made by developed countries to establish a fair game in the movement of talent as they march to maintain their competitiveness and socio-economic hegemony, at times visibly at the expense of the socio-economic progress of developing countries.
> (Teferra, 2005, p.33)

In the European context, some authors (see, for example, Kukovec, 2015) argue that when there is a conflict of interests between the centre and the periphery, social claims coming from the centre take precedence because they are perceived as universal (see chapter 4). The case of imbalanced mobility shows that formal powers are not enough, since the WG Mobility was headed by the representative of a losing country (Armenia), while another loser (Albania) co-chaired the BFUG during that time (the second semester of 2010). As discussed in chapter 6, the reasons for that may be found in the shared understanding of the policy elite in the losing countries. The following quotation from the Albanian minister who co-chaired the BFUG illustrates the power of 'common-sense' in shaping actors' preferences, by persuading them to internalize the hierarchy and act according to what they deem as appropriate for them. Therefore, although both ministers were formally equal in chairing the BFUG, the Albanian minister perceived his/her role as being in the passenger seat:

> In the Secretariat, we had a secondary role. In the **driver's seat** was our counterpart, the Belgian Ministry… It is not that we had any power. In a sense we had only a coordination role… So, we would decide what would be addressed during the two years until the next ministerial conference.
> (AP06, Albanian minister, co-chair of the BFUG)

Subsequently, after the Bucharest conference of 2012, the issue of imbalanced mobility lost momentum and fell out of the common agenda. Consequently, it is not mentioned in the Paris communique, while other issues, such as online learning and Bologna implementation monitoring, are elevated to the top of the common agenda. Those issues generated heated

debate in the preparatory work for the Paris conference, where country representatives debated for two years (interview with AP04, 16.02.2018).

During these years, the position of various countries has changed multiple times, however the evidence that I have collected for this study suggests that at least five representatives have expressed criticism about the issues identified above, including those of Greece, Italy, France, Bulgaria and Albania. Some BFUG members, including Albania, have been concerned about the obligation to recognise online courses in their country, as they fear that recognizing diplomas acquired online will have a negative impact not only on their established higher education system but also on the labour market. Hence, backed up by some other colleagues, including those from Italy, they have voiced discontent about this commitment in the BFUG meetings. During my fieldwork in Albania, several months before the Paris conference, the Albanian representative in the BFUG expressed her strong opposition to this commitment:

> I cannot allow online courses at this moment because it would be a step back for my country…if the conditions of a country are not suitable to achieve a certain standard, it would be better for it not to take that step because it will lead to a deterioration of the situation…
>
> (AP04, country representative in the BFUG)

However, these disputes, while being confirmed by several BFUG members, are barely reflected in the official minutes of the BFUG meetings. This omission was noted by the Albanian representative who complained in the subsequent meeting that the minutes of the previous meetings did not accurately represent what was discussed there:

> In the minutes of the meeting, it was reflected as though in the previous one we had approved it. Usually, we get together, and they say: “Let’s approve the minutes of the meeting”. Most countries do not read the minutes at all, to be honest, so we raise a hand... In fact, in these minutes was written, something that is not true... Then Italy raised a hand, and the first thing he said was "I do not approve the minutes of the meeting. If you like, go and check the audio-recordings and you will see that we have not approved it".
>
> (AP04, country representative to the BFUG)

This complaint was recognised by the BFUG, and the minutes were revised. “The Co-chair (Bulgaria) announced that even if the minutes had been published, the wording would be revised once more...” (BFUG minutes of the meeting, last updated on 21.06.2018, p.3).

When I interviewed the Albanian representative in the BFUG in February of 2018, he/she believed that the final draft of the Paris *communique* would not force countries to apply reforms that go beyond their capacities and contradict their interests. Speaking of online courses, they pointed to the danger that was avoided by omitting this commitment from the final draft:

> You cannot ask a country with a certain mentality to apply what Denmark or England deems are appropriate, because they have a completely different approach and mentality… Had this [commitment been approved] it would put our country in very serious difficulties.
>
> (AP04, country representative in the BFUG)

Nevertheless, when on 27th April 2018 the BFUG secretariat circulated the 8th draft of the communique to all BFUG members, it became obvious that this debate was far from settled. On 4th May an EU Commission official, speaking in the name of CoE, EUA, EURASHE and ENQA, suggested some adaptations to the final text of the Paris communique, which according to them were merely technical and consisting of language choices. This suggestion was met with stiff resistance from several delegations, including Albania, which wrote the following reply:

> I would not intend to send comments on [this version of the] communiquè. This [is] in order to be fair with our common decision taken during last BFUG meeting…These changes were largely discussed during the [BFUG] meeting and agreed by all of us... Thus, this part of the text would stay as we decided since those changes are not simply rewordings, and most of them already [are] discussed during our [last BFUG] meeting.

Preparing for the Conference

As discussed above, the ministerial conferences are the most powerful decision-making structure of Bologna. They are held every two years, and the entire work of the permanent Bologna governing structures is dependent on them. The communiques that are issued in these conferences set the education agenda for 48 countries of the European continent.

However, small developing countries are often disadvantaged in these international conferences, for they lack the necessary diplomatic capacities, and because, due to weak institutions, foreign policy is often in the hands of unaccountable individuals (see Hey, 2003).

For instance, in the Paris ministerial conference of 2018, which is discussed below, Albania is represented by the following delegation:

1. The deputy minister for youth, at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (henceforth the Ministry). The minister is not attending, while the vice-minister for education had other engagements. Hence, the Ministry is represented by the deputy for youth, who is not very familiar with higher education policies, including Bologna. He is a 28-year-old politician, who also serves as the vice-chairman of the Youth Forum of the political party in power. He has received a BA in communication and an MBA from private universities in Albania.
2. The director of the Directorate for European integration in the Ministry. A civil servant for a decade, he/she has been the focal point of Bologna in Albania, ever since their predecessor left the Ministry. He/she holds a PhD from an Italian university, and their fluency in Italian has helped them forge close relationships with the Italian delegation.
3. A university rector, who, although young, has served for some years as dean of faculty, before taking the current position as university rector. He/She holds a PhD from Turkey. It is unclear if they represent the conference of rectors here.
4. A graduate student who is not a member of any student council, but is part of the "excellence club", which is established by the deputy minister of education and is allegedly reserved to children of the political elite of Tirana.

Notwithstanding the personal merits of each delegation member, its composition does not guarantee that interests of stakeholders are fully represented in this Conference. Moreover, the minister has chosen not to attend (not for the first time), while the deputy minister for higher education has other (obviously more important) engagements. That might illustrate how negligible key decisionmakers, like ministers and their deputies, see their role in this process. Consequently, the lack of relevant expertise and the limited decision-making capacities of the young and inexperienced deputy minister for youth, who leads the delegation, pose significant limitations to the ability of Albania to represent and defend its interests at this conference.

Secondly, representatives of the stakeholders in the delegation are not accountable to the groups they claim to represent. Although in 2008 Albania reported the establishment of a national BFUG (country report, 2008), that structure ceased its operations some years ago (AP04). Consequently, delegation members are selected by the Ministry through a top-down process that is far from being transparent:

> **Question**: *Do you remember who invited you to the ministerial conference?*
>
> Yes. It was [AP04]. [Laughs] [he/she] called me. Normally I was excited because it is a beautiful experience. Above all, it is an acknowledgement. I was stressed like 'what am I going to do there?'...
>
> (AG12, delegation member in the Yerevan ministerial conference)

Moreover, some interviewees alleged that the Ministry uses participation in these conferences as a 'carrot' for the stakeholders that hold favourable views of its policies. It should be mentioned here that the Albanian society has experienced a long period of total isolation (King,

2005), and that even relatively recently, going to the EU entailed a lengthy visa application process. Understandably, many actors view international conferences as an opportunity to travel abroad and see the world. For instance, when I asked the PM advisor (AP03) why some ministers do not attend Bologna ministerial conferences, their answer was that it might be that they “have already seen that country [and are] not interested in visiting.".

Similarly, another journalist (AG18) who attended the Bergen ministerial conference in 2005 argued that some delegation members skipped meetings, because they “couldn’t wait to go shopping…”. She alleges that there are “many public officials [who] participate in meetings, and [official] trips abroad, just to have some holidays”. An illustrative example might be one delegation member in the Yerevan ministerial conference of 2015, who three years later did not have any recollection of what was discussed in the conference, but had vivid memories of Yerevan’s touristic landmarks, the Armenian culture, and common physical traits of people.

> We attended the Conference in Armenia, which was the 4th forum[16] of Bologna, if I am not mistaken…Unfortunately, at the moment **I have a grave loss of memory** for what I have done there, for the topics that we may have discussed and stuff like that...[fifteen minutes in the interview] Armenia had something... it had many things in common with Albania. From the language, the dishes, and many other things. [for instance] “fountain” there was called ‘shatervan’ [like the Albanian word]… the traditional dish there was our [Albanian dish] ‘japrak’ [laughs]…There are also some distinctive physical features....
>
> (AG12, delegation member in Yerevan conference)

Thirdly, the lack of accountability of the delegation members gives them no incentives to participate in the conference with an agenda that represents the interests of their social group. For instance, multiple sources confirm that Albanian delegations rarely meet before the conference to discuss what they should expect and what to achieve from these events:

> I’ve attended the 10th anniversary of Bologna...in 2009 in Vienna… We didn't have expectations [from the participation in the conference]. Neither did the Minister of Education have any kind of agenda [before we went there]...
>
> (AP03, advisor to the PM for education)

> **Question**: *What concerns did you, as a delegation have, before participating in the Bergen conference?*
>
> No, we did not have... [sigh]. Look, the group was appointed by the Ministry of Education... Why they chose these people, I can’t tell…

[16] It was actually the 10th ministerial Conference of Bologna

> **Question**: *Well, when you went there, did you have an agenda of what you would achieve or should expect?*
>
> No, no, no. It was all formal. I mean, we went there… convinced that we would carry out a formality...
>
> (AG13, President of the Conference of Rectors in Albania)

The view from Lithuania is a bit different. Firstly, the delegation members from Lithuania are automatically the members of the national BFUG group, which is composed of representatives of the stakeholders. For instance, if the Albania's delegation is composed of an apparently random student and a random university rector, the Lithuanian delegation is composed of the president of the National Student's Union (LSS), and the president of the Rector's Conference. Even the delegation size of Lithuania is twice that of Albania. So, in the Paris conference Lithuania is represented by the following delegation:

1. The minister of Education and Science, a young politician, with research experience. Before becoming minister, she was leading the Government's Strategic Analytical Center (MOSTA) for almost a decade. Prior to that, she was working for the Phare, an EU pre-accession program for Central and Eastern Europe. Also, after resignation, a couple of months after the Paris conference, she started working for the OECD.
2. The deputy minister of education. He has worked for six years at the Ministry of Education and Science and has held many positions: such as deputy-minister, minister's advisor, and secretary-general. He has also held several leading positions at public universities in Lithuania. He was the Lithuanian representative in the BFUG, and a couple of months after the Paris conference, he became the chair of MOSTA.
3. The leader of the Lithuanian National Student's Union (LSS). He had recently completed his Master's studies in management, in a public university. He had taken the lead of the National Student's Union when the previous leader got the job at the Ministry. The organization that he represented is a member of the European Students Union (ESU).
4. The minister's advisor, a young public servant, with a degree in law. He used to lead the LSS before taking the job at the Ministry. Although without much prior administrative experience, one month after the Paris' Conference he became the next representative of Lithuania in the BFUG.
5. The President of Lithuanian Rectors' Conference. He is a scientist and a member of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. He has benefitted from some academic experiences in the US, due to some exchange programs between universities. During the interview, he took pride in his father's key role in the communist nomenclatura.
6. The director of the largest college in Lithuania. He is a senior academic with a long experience in leading positions. He had led one important polytechnic university, before becoming the director of the largest college in Lithuania, which is the output of several merged colleges.
7. The head of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), who represents the country in the BFUG. She worked for more than a decade at the SKVC, until she left it two months after the Paris conference, to work for a public university.

Secondly, evidence suggests that the Lithuanian delegation met before the conference to discuss and agree on their expectations. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that these meetings made a substantial difference, given the shared understanding among the policy elite about these events and Bologna in general. As discussed below, viewing Bologna as policy learning does not encourage delegations to see these conferences as an opportunity to update the common policy agenda to ensure that it responds to the national context:

> Before this meeting, we met roughly twice a month, and [we discussed] all the policy papers that actually are represented here… This conference, for me, is just another opportunity to share the experiences, and [create a] network with people... this conference is a great opportunity for me to go abroad...
> (LG04, student representative in the National BFUG)

> **Question**: *How often did the national Bologna Follow Up group meet?*
>
> We used to meet quite often because we had plans for two years: what we were aiming to achieve.
>
> **Question**: Was this about downloading policies, or uploading your interests to the common agenda of Bologna?
>
> I would say that our group was much more a follower. Usually, we met just for sharing information.
>
> (LG05, member of the national BFUG in Lithuania)

7.3 The ministerial Conference – A voyage to Paris

Day 1: Wednesday, 23rd May 2018, 4.30 pm, Sorbonne University, Paris.

It is the morning of a spring day in Paris. I am waiting in front of the "Notre-Dame de Paris" cathedral to meet the Albanian delegation, who will represent the country in the ministerial conference that starts this afternoon. I have met with some of them during my fieldwork in Albania, and AP04, who is the central figure in this delegation, agreed to allow me to follow them throughout the conference, observe their behaviour and interview them. The first to arrive is the university rector. Through a common friend, he/she has asked me in advance to show them around Paris, given my familiarity with the city. We are later joined by the deputy minister, the student and AP04, in a stroll around tourist highlights of Paris.

We engage in informal conversations about the importance of this conference, as well as their worldview on education, migration, Europe and the future of Albania. They confirm that the expenses of the Albanian delegation are covered by the Ministry of education, which has also

selected the participants, based primarily on social connections. They also tell me that there were no meetings before the conference to discuss it and coordinate their action. Even now, they do not seem to have any expectation for this conference. I discuss with AP04 about our last interview, and he/she tells me that they believe that they can influence the Paris communique, especially regarding the commitment to online digital learning. It is interesting to note that this resistance is neither coming from the minister, nor from the interest groups. He/she tells me that their resistance on online learning is out of personal responsibility to defend higher education at home because they are aware of the potential ramifications of it. The student tells me that they would like to meet with representatives of the European Student Union (ESU) and gain their support to establish a national student's council in Albania. This is not a demand coming from students at their university, but just a personal initiative of goodwill. The rest of the delegation tell me that they see this conference as a formality and their role as negligible. To that end, they are looking forward to enjoying these days in Paris.

It is Wednesday afternoon, and I have just arrived at the Sorbonne's main hall where the opening ceremony is about to begin. Sorbonne is one of the oldest universities in the world, and the Bologna process started at the commemoration ceremony of its 800th anniversary.

As I am standing at the main hall, I observe delegations from all over Europe entering the building, one after the other. I see that half of the Albanian delegation, the deputy minister and the student, have arrived, but since AP04 is running late, they do not know where to go, whom to meet with or even where to sit. They seem stressed and confused. As I will later learn, a previously arranged meeting is cancelled, due to this confusion.

As the organisers start to group participants according to the country they represent, I start searching for the Lithuanian delegation. I manage to identify six of them, but not the deputy minister who represents the country in the BFUG. I keep them in sight as we are all guided towards the main hall after we enjoy a tour around this baroque building.



Image 7.1. Sorbonne University, first-day event of the ministerial Conference 23/05/2018

We enter the *Grand Amphitheatre,* which has a large mural painting of the XIX century titled 'Allegory of the Sorbonne" by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (Image 7.1, above). For practical reasons, the screen is integrated into this painting that symbolizes the ideals of the Sorbonne (Metmuseum, 2020). This view gives the impression that the past and the future are intertwined, and European culture is a continuum. As delegation members will later tell me, just being in this building "reminds you of what Europe is": here space operates as a social construction that represents and promotes a shared understanding of what Europe is and ought to be. As Carter, Freeman, & Lawn, (2015, p.11) succinctly put it: "space is not only physical; it is also always imagined" and this building, which represents Enlightenment Europe, contributes to the construction of what Anderson calls "imagined community" (1983). The event starts with a short historical documentary "2018: 20 Years of the Sorbonne Joint Declaration". It uses a timeline that creates the impression that the Bologna process is part of the Magna Carta Universitatum, which is another initiative started three decades ago by European universities. I am not sure how accurate it is to portray these two processes as intertwined, because Magna Carta Universitatum, which was initiated in Bologna by 388 university rectors at the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna, in 1988, represents a charter of ideals shared by the academic community in Europe (Observatory, 2018).The Bologna Process, on the other hand, is an intergovernmental process where the lead is taken by the ministers, whose primary objective was to help the labour market (see chapter 4).

Nevertheless, these two processes are presented as intertwined by the policy elite[17], and this documentary is probably contributing to that potential confusion.

Then the documentary features the signatories of the Sorbonne communique in 1998, including the French minister of education, Claude Allegre, who is quoted explaining the importance and the rationale behind this initiative:

> If we could come back, little by little, with each partner… to something that will allow students' mobility, because we must not forget that it is the most important point, we would have accomplished a great task.
> We are putting in place a frame for European curricula that will allow students… to travel, to have their diplomas automatically recognised, with automatic equivalencies, because the frame will be the same.
>
> (Claude Allegre, then the minister of education in France, one of the founders of the Bologna process. Translation featured in the documentary)

Next, there are some presentations and addresses from guests, three out of six of which are on digital learning and online courses (See the conference's agenda in Appendix 7.1). That disproportionate representation of this topic may indicate an interest in elevating it to the top of the Bologna agenda, by persuading the policy-makers about its importance and benefits. Furthermore, by employing a discourse that frames online learning as part of the modernization agenda and linking it to an idealised view of Europe (i.e. as borderless and innovative) the forging of a ruling consensus over this controversial policy (see chapter 6) is enabled. Similarly, by calling on students, as "the guardians of the future", to promote this policy goal, opponents of this policy, such as AP04 are placed in a difficult moral position, for they will be perceived as going against modernity and denying students the world they will want to live in in the future. This discursive strategy, which is coupled with some bold backstage moves, which are revealed to me by some country representatives in the BFUG, is not new in European politics (see Wodak, 2015 on the EU backstage vs frontstage politics). As discussed in chapter 6, it is an effective exercise of power in preventing opposition to the dominant consensus over this policy agenda.

[17] Most of my interviews in Albania, including the minister who applied for Bologna membership, refer to the Bologna Declaration as the "Bologna charter", because they confuse these two processes.

When the last presentation ends, we head to a banquet where participants can meet and socialize with each other. As discussed in chapter 5, socialization is an effective soft governing tool, and it is used extensively to manufacture consent within the Bologna context. Congruently, the program of this conference provides plenty of opportunities to socialize.

I am still with the Albanian delegation, which is reduced to the deputy minister and the student. The very young age of the former seems to draw the attention of people he meets, some of whom make some friendly remarks. The university rector has already found the event quite dull and is waiting at a nearby café, whereas AP04 is staying with other BFUG representatives, with whom they maintain a friendly relationship. Country representatives in the BFUG spend a lot of time working together, and therefore they often establish a personal rapport, which then increases the social costs of going against the ruling consensus. Other researchers have found that the need to maintain friendly relationships limits the opposition to the ruling consensus on a policy domain (see, for example, Freeman, 2008 on learning by meeting). This sentiment is illustrated from this quotation from the Albanian representative in the BFUG, who, although has been part of the BFUG for many years, still refers to other members as "they" (probably indicating an incomplete integration into "the community"):

> There is a community [within the BFUG]. There is because all these working groups do something to stimulate the feeling of **being part of the community**... That is to say, that there is a kind of friendship between the people that are in. Of course, there is a kind of friendship... And **they** have established a kind of, how to say, familiarity with each other, and often **they** do not [pauses] .... **they** do not risk this relationship.

I try to keep within my sight the Lithuanian delegation, who are staying together in a corner of the room. Once again, their representative to the BFUG is not with them, and the minister is sharing her time between the rest of the delegation and other political actors she meets for short talks. Several authors, discussed in chapter 6, argue that interest groups in countries like Albania and Lithuania join international cooperation as a way to enrich their international networks (see Pevehouse, 2002). However, in this conference, I observe that both delegations are not enriching their international networks, for they tend to stay within their group and interact very little with other delegations or international actors.

When the banquet is over, the Albanian delegation heads to a bistro, where we have a relaxed and informal conversation. AP04 is advising the deputy minister on the conference and what he should say tomorrow. He/she stresses that the deputy minister should explain that Albania cannot be forced to implement digital online learning beyond its capacities, and that therefore even if that commitment is included in the Paris communique, it should be framed as facilitative, depending on the country's interest and capacity. Then, they talk about the speech that they have prepared for him.

This episode reveals a power relation that reverses the order of the formal hierarchy, in which the deputy minister takes orders from AP04, who *de jure* is his subordinate because the latter has knowledge that the former lacks. This relationship illustrates what is discussed in chapters 2 and 6, about the power of the action elite, and the shift from government to governance.

As we are getting ready to leave the bistro and head home, AP04 receives an email on their phone, which changes their mood. He/she gets angry, turns to me, leans and speaks with a lower tone as though they do not want other people to hear:

> After the debate that we had about the online courses, we had agreed not to include it in the final communique. In the last draft [of the communique], that they circulated this evening, they have included it. And people cease to resist either because they get tired, or because they find it pointless and therefore give up.

Apparently, the email they are referring to is from the BFUG secretariat, about the final draft of the Paris communique, which will be endorsed tomorrow morning, before it is adopted by the ministers on Friday (Draft roadmap for the consultation of the BFUG, 27.04.2018). This frustration stems from the debate described at the beginning of this chapter, which lasted for months and was settled with the agreement that no further changes would be made.

Day 2: Thursday, 24th May, Palais Brongniart, Paris

The second day of the conference is organized at the Palais Brongniart, a neoclassical Roman building, commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte (Palais Brongniart, 2020). In the leaflets distributed by the organisers, it is explained that this historical building used to be the stock exchange, but now serves as one of the largest conference centres in the heart of Paris.

The day starts with the BFUG meeting, in which country representatives are required to endorse the final draft of the communique. The meeting lasts for 45 minutes (Appendix 7.1), and despite the frustration expressed the previous day by AP04, there are no debates or disagreements among the participants. Apparently, previous criticism is subdued. As discussed in chapters 2 and 6, criticism can be prevented by powerful actors. The concept of two faces of power (Barach and Baratz 1970) holds that actors' preferences are not altered, as they retain their critical view, but their opportunities to challenge the dominant consensus are limited by design. In line with this analysis, as I speak with both delegations, I witness the presence of strong critical views about Bologna and imbalanced mobility:

> They say it's a principle of the European Union, that it's a free [movement] of manpower and it's the principle of the Bologna process. Everyone goes everywhere they want, and it's ok. But there is no competition… I think big countries like Germany, France, Italy, the UK, they do not take care of us. They care for their own interests. They want talents, they want cheap manpower, they are quite selfish.
>
> (LG03, President of the Rectors' Conference)

However, this criticism is prevented from going public, due to the way in which this conference is organized. Unlike previous ministerial conferences, in this one, the audience is divided into smaller groups and discussions are developed in parallel sessions that are held in separate rooms. Since it becomes impossible to follow what is being discussed in other rooms, a rapporteur for each group prepares a summary that is later reported to the plenary meeting. However, this design increases the chances that criticism is filtered out and a good deal of criticism may get "lost in translation", as admitted by one of the rapporteurs:

> The way it [the conference] was organized with small debating rooms... [sigh], I did not like it. I did not like it because you say something in one session, and the things you say in the session, **I can report them literally, or not**. That depends on what I think was said. Discussions have not been separated like this before [in previous conferences], and this is not normal.
>
> (AP04, rapporteur of the parallel session "EHEA beyond 2020")

Hence, as we all gather in the plenary session room, the conference is officially opened by the moderator. Another novelty of this conference is that moderation is not done by the minister of the host country, but by a designated professional moderator (De Brem, 2020). The moderator invites hundreds of attendees to choose one of the parallel sessions. I see the programme, and I choose the session entitled “Meeting implementation challenges together” at the “Grand Auditorium”, where the Albanian deputy minister will deliver his speech.





Image 7.2 - The plenary room, the round table for the ministers **Image 7.3** - the podium and the back seats

As I enter the auditorium, I recognise a pattern in the arrangements of the conference rooms, which prevents conflict and contains discontent. The main plenary sessions room resembles a roundtable, as the Ministers, following an alphabetic order, sit on two parallel lines facing each other (Image 7.2, above). However, in a display of hierarchy, a one-meter high platform and a podium for the key speakers stand at the centre of the room (image 7.3. above). Stakeholders sit behind the ministers, where they have headphones, but not direct access to microphones, which shows who is here to speak and who is expected just to listen.

Similarly, smaller discussion rooms, including the one I am in now, have an elevated platform opposite the audience, as shown in image 7.4 (below). The ministers and representatives of international organizations sit on a platform that confronts the audience, where the other members of the delegations are also seated. To participate in the debate, people in the audience must ask for the microphone, which is brought by an aide, guided by the moderator.



Image 7.4 – Grand Auditorium, one of the smaller rooms where parallel sessions were held

Another limitation that I observe is the time allocated for the interaction of the panel with the audience. The whole session lasts 60 minutes, and that includes seven presentations from the panel, one introduction from the moderator and an open discussion between the panel and the audience. Thus, Questions and Answers (Q&A) last for only a very few minutes and the audience must compete for the limited time available. Nevertheless, there are two interventions from the audience, which are left unanswered, because the time is up, and the moderator closes the session abruptly. Observing similar behaviour in another session by another moderator, I assume that they are advised by the organizers to be rigid on time management. In sum, inadvertently or not, this way of organizing the conference has left very little room for feedback from the audience and consequently for criticism of Bologna.

Nevertheless, external limitations are only one side of the coin. As discussed in chapter 2, the concept of three-dimensionality of power (Lukes, 2004) holds that conflict is eliminated when actors' preferences are altered. Thus, a shared understanding, and the *common sense* can prevent actors from voicing their discontent, even in the absence of external obstacles.

As discussed in chapter 6, the policy elite in both countries perceives Bologna as a policy learning process, and therefore these conferences are not seen as spaces to discuss and negotiate policies, but as opportunities to learn how to implement Bologna better, and to measure their progress through comparison with other countries:

> **Question**: *What do you expect to achieve from this conference?*
>
> I have to understand where we are [with the implementation of Bologna commitments]. I think to have such evaluation [from Bologna implementation reports] **is important to understand where we are**, and I think that we have made good progress, but also this [Bologna implementation] report h**elps us to see what are the challenges behind** and this is where we have to put a lot of effort in trying.
>
> (LP01, Lithuanian Minister)

As discussed in chapter 2, comparison encourages policy implementation by inducing competition and by introducing a measurement of progress. It also helps in de-contextualizing knowledge and presenting certain policies as universal and transferable solutions to some shared policy problems (Ozga, 2018; see also Grundmann & Stehr, 2012). Moreover, comparison is encouraged through soft governing tools that promote policy congruence in the Europeanisation domain in general, and through Bologna policies in particular (Veiga & Amaral, 2012). To that end, implementation benchmarks and comparative maps are developed to grade countries on policy implementation (see Grek & Lawn, 2015).

An illustration of this argument is the presentation of the Eurydice's Report (EACEA, 2018). It displays a map, which shows Albania as one of the three countries that still do not offer online courses (EACEA, 2018, p.80, figure 2.29). I am sitting next to the Albanian delegation members, who do not like being in this category, especially when the other country is Belarus.

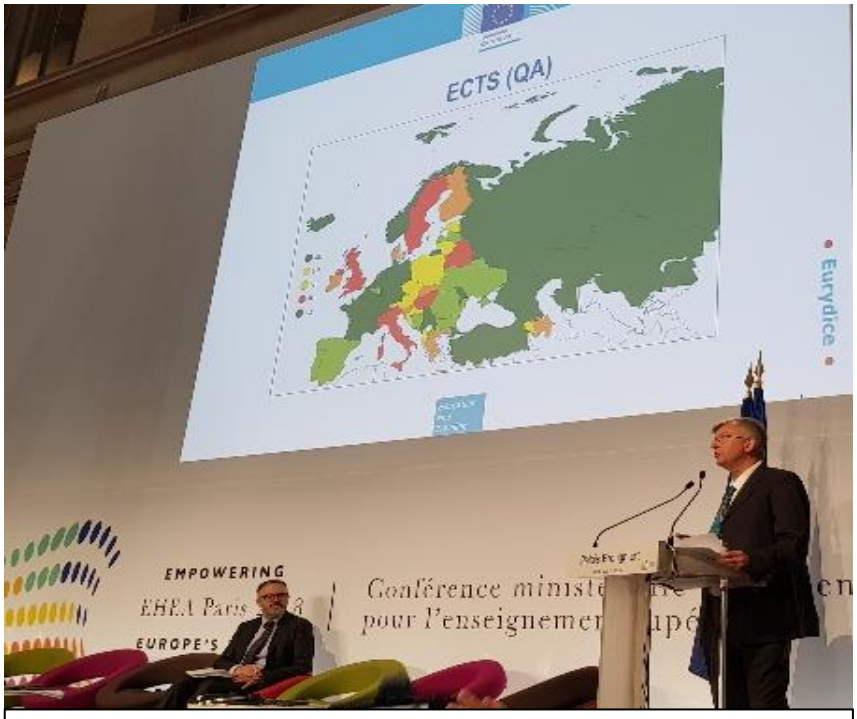


Image 7.5. Implementation maps presented at the plenary session.

The other slide is a map that divides countries into categories, using a five-colour scheme, based on their progress in implementing Bologna commitments (see image 7.5, above).

These colour-coded maps represent a data visualization process, that facilitates information transfer and comprehension (Ozga, 2018; Normand 2016), making it easy to shame and blame countries that fail to comply with Bologna policies. These categories, each represented by a different colour, are persuasive, entering people's consciousness and leading them into the mindset of comparison. Consequently, actors respond to the stress of being illustrated into the "wrong" category, by implementing policies that go against their initial preferences:

> Sometimes they put **the lights: the green, the red, the yellow,** etc. Sometimes [they are like] "this is yellow", and you have to do something. Of course, you have to defend that...
>
> (LG05, member of the national BFUG in Lithuania)

> **Question**: *Is this some form of pressure over you? Is it somehow stressful to see your country marked 'red' on the map?*
>
> Yes, yes, yes. It is pressure, and it is good to have some pressure. They [Bologna leading structures] use this pressure to make us [Albania] engaged at the political level. And that is not a bad thing, to some extent if you know what I mean.
>
> (AP04, Albania's representative in the BFUG)

In addition, many country representatives embrace the role of the 'model pupil' seeking ~~for~~ guidance from external authority and relying on standardized assessment to measure their progress towards a policy agenda over which they have little control (see Simola et al., 2009; Rinne, et al., 2004). Thus, like a 'model pupil,' they take pride in doing their homework, sometimes even when they are not expected to, as in the case of Albania implementing Bologna before its membership application was accepted:

> It can't be more **beautiful** than saying that Albania achieved one, two, three, four, five results even before adhering to the Bologna process… All of this gives us the opportunity to **compare** with others. I tell you that *big guns*, EU countries with a rich tradition in higher education **did not embrace the Bologna process as quickly as us**...
>
> (AP07, director for higher education, Albania)

Accordingly, these actors come to ministerial conferences like this one, not to complain about the overload of homework, but to show that they deserve a 'good grade', even if that means inflating achievements, and sweeping shortcomings under the carpet. To illustrate, while the speech of the Albanian deputy minister tends to inflate the progress of the country in

implementing Bologna, the Lithuanian minister downplays the impact of the decline in student numbers, by presenting university mergers as a natural phenomenon that is occurring everywhere, despite the lack of evidence in support of this claim.

> We are also considering and managing **mergers** of Higher Education Institutions, which is undergoing, seems to be, or at least is discussed, in a lot of countries, **everywhere**.
>
> (LP01, Lithuanian Minister, emphasis added)

Moreover, the policy learning mentality consolidates a hierarchical relationship, in which country representatives accept, and even demand, an external authority to teach them how to govern and to evaluate their work. Consequently, although participating in intergovernmental cooperation, representatives of Albania and Lithuania do not expect to be treated as equals:

> I would say that our group was much more a **follower**. Usually, we met just for sharing information…[In the ministerial conference] the aim of us was to find out what are the new policies. [We also prepared presentations] to share our experiences, and to **tell them how well we are processing**.
>
> (LG05, member of national BFUG in Lithuania)

> In my perspective, I don't believe we could have changed anything [at the Bergen ministerial conference] because it was **the more advanced countries** that had already piloted this model, which came with conclusions.
>
> (AP09, deputy minister, Albania)

> They [the leaders of Bologna] were more interested in having countries like Albania in their map... Of course, not in the front seat, such as France or Italy…
>
> (AG13, President of the Conference of rectors in Albania)

This *common sense* is developed in an environment where actors behave according to what they deem as appropriate for their role and identity and use discourse to legitimize it. On the one hand, some representatives of the winners act as if their interests and preferences should prevail. For instance, Albanian delegation members in Paris complained that they feel intimidated by their colleagues' expressions such as "how do you know when you represent such a tiny number of students?", or when representatives of developed countries bolster their position by saying "we know it better, as we are the dinosaurs of the Bologna process".

> When you compare [small countries] with countries such as Italy, France, Germany, Spain, which have a vast number of... millions of students, undoubtedly that problems that arise in big countries are far greater than in a country that has only "two cats" (Italian expression). Hence, they [big countries] say "Don't worry! They are just two people. They will eventually find a way".
>
> (AP04, Country Representative in the BFUG)

On the other hand, some representatives of the losers act as if their preferences should not matter. For instance, one member of the Albanian delegation, complained to me about the presentation on Bologna implementation. But, when the moderator invited the audience to contribute with questions and comments, they understood that they were not included in the "everyone". This sentiment is illustrated by the following quotation:

> I mean, we definitely come from a [political] culture that I, for example, can't say that I have the easiness of foreigners to take the floor in meetings, I can't... You are afraid to ask questions because your question can be judged. This is in our philosophy [of life] because that is how we are taught, at least my generation.
> (AG18, Albanian journalist, a participant in the Bergen conference)

Next, before the ministers go for a Photo op, the moderator informs us that the French minister of higher education has invited all the participants for a cultural event this evening.

It is Wednesday evening, and we are at the National Theatre of Chaillot, which is in a very touristic part of Paris, overlooking the Jardins du Trocadero, the Seine and the Eiffel tower. The Albanian delegation, like everyone else, is very excited about the view. The Eiffel tower is one of the top landmarks of Europe[18] and delegates cannot help taking plenty of pictures. We are attending a modern ballet performance by Prelocaj, a renowned choreographer, who is the son of an Albanian immigrant to Paris. This fact opens a discussion among the Albanian delegation about the possibilities that host countries such as France offer to emigrants to advance their careers. Their conversation reiterates the dominant perception on emigration.

Afterwards, dinner is served in the dining hall of the Palais Chaillot, with the Eiffel tower in the background. I sit with members of the Albanian delegation (Image 7.6). Country representatives, in the BUFG, including AP04, are sitting together, which is another illustration of the argument discussed in chapter 2 on integration of elites (Sandholtz & Sweet, 2013).



Image 7.6: Dinner at the Restaurant of the Chaillot Theatre.

[18] On a google search with keywords "landmarks of Europe" Eiffel tower comes second.

After the dinner, on a metro home, I start checking social media, in order to see how both delegations, communicate this event to their own audiences. In the Lithuanian camp, the minister's advisor has described it as follows (see image 7.7, below):

> The conference of the European higher education space was opened yesterday at Sorbonne University…30 years ago, 388 universities signed "Magna Carta Universita" - a document that approved universities and academic freedom and has greatly contributed to the creation of European universities. 20 years ago, the Sorbonne declaration was signed, which…started a process that could not have been foreseen even by the most ambitious person of that time... Such anniversaries, [have] changed the higher education situation in Europe and are…**a festive mood**. Today we are talking about challenges, and tomorrow the ministers will sign the Paris communique. More about this - later.

This text is clearly influenced by the content of the promotional materials distributed during the conference, and it sounds very similar to the perspective of the documentary discussed above. For instance, the Bologna process is once again discussed within the historical framework of the Magna Carta Universitatum. Additionally, I observe that the language used to describe the conference presents it as a ceremonial event as if the point is to celebrate what has been achieved, rather than to negotiate what will be done in the next two years, and beyond.

The Lithuanian Student Council posts another picture of the delegation (image 7.8 below), with a short text that highlights the participation of LSS's president in this conference.



Image 7.7 Photo of the Lithuanian delegation, posted in the official social media page of the Student's Union and SKVC.

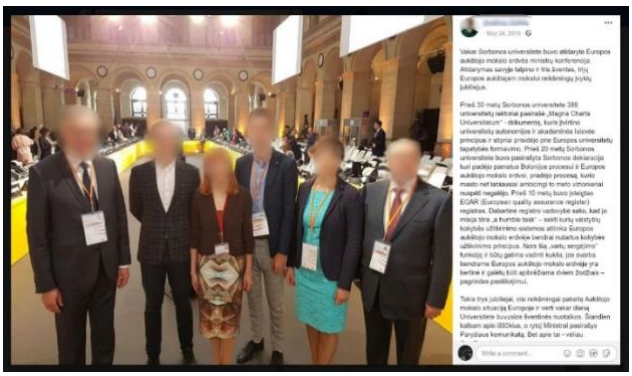


Image 7.8 Photo of the Lithuanian delegation, posted in the public social media profile of the minister's advisor.

In the other camp, both the university rector and the Albanian deputy minister have posted pictures of the view from Palais de Chaillot's (see images 7.9 and 7.10, below). Additionally, the deputy minister has posted several pictures of meetings with other ministers. From these posts, one can gather that the conference is merely a ceremony to celebrate Europe.

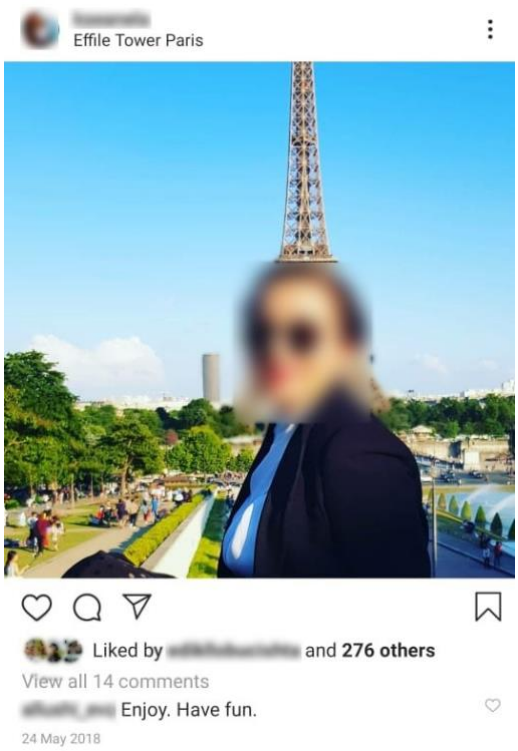


Image 7.9 Photo posted by one delegation member in their social media profile, during their stay in Paris

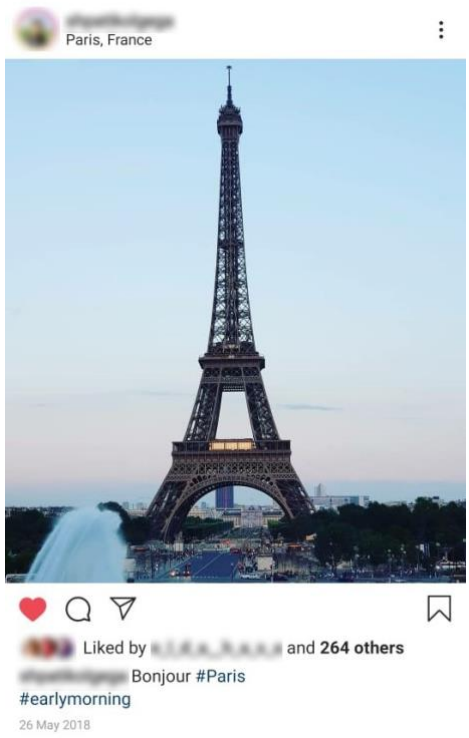


Image 7.10 Photo posted by the deputy minister in their social media profile, during their stay in Paris

Day 3: Friday, 25th May, the Paris communique

The last day of the conference starts with a presentation from the European Commission DG at the plenary session room of the Palais Brongniart. Afterwards, all participants are once more divided into small parallel sessions. I observe the same organization as the previous day, including the same rigidity about the allocated time for feedback from the audience. It makes me believe that even if this organization is not deliberately designed to prevent criticism, this situation is far from being the inadvertent outcome of the moderator's decisions.

Next, everyone is gathered in the plenary session where the Paris communique is being read by the representative of the French Ministry of education. *Inter alia*, it states:

> …We will enable our education systems to make better use of digital and blended education, with appropriate quality assurance, in order to enhance lifelong and flexible learning, foster digital skills and competencies, improve data analysis, educational research and foresight, and *remove regulatory obstacles to the provision of open and digital education*…
>
> (Bologna communique, 2018, emphasis added)

This is the version endorsed by the country representatives in the BFUG meetings, but the ministers do not have to adopt it as it is, should they have any concern, suggestion or recommendation. The moderator opens the floor for discussions, but none of the participants, including the ministers, takes this opportunity to voice any of the reservations that they shared with me, as discussed above. For instance, the Albanian deputy minister did not speak up for the obligation to remove regulatory obstacles to online learning. Similarly, the Lithuanian minister, during her interview with me the previous day, hinted to some tension over another topic of the Paris communique, which she thought would not be pushed forward:

> [W]hen we are discussing European University networks… I'm not sceptical about the idea, but I think that should be an inclusive process and the very open dialogue about this… [Hence] the current communique puts a very **subtle** mentioning that **the idea will be considered**, or something like this. So, I think this is a clear notice that it **is not**… **agreed or being pushed forward**.
>
> (LP01, Lithuanian minister)

However, although the text relating to the European University network initiative has changed from the earlier versions, the idea of European universities is actually pushed forward even more in the final communique then it was in the earlier drafts. Thus, in Draft number 6 of the Paris communique (04/04/2018) it was articulated as follows:

> We take note of the recent EU initiative of creating networks of European universities for increased mobility and closer cross-border cooperation in higher education and research, which could serve as inspiration for strengthening up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA)

It became in the Paris communique version adopted on 25/05/2018 (emphasis added):

> We take note with interest of the recent EU initiative on 'European Universities', and we **will encourage all our higher education institutions to work in such new settings.**

That is why, when the Lithuanian minister takes the floor, I expect her to voice her criticism about this issue. However, she talks for a couple of minutes, emphasizing the importance of this cooperation and praises the good job that is done in pushing this agenda forward. There are no complaints, and this issue is not mentioned in her short speech.

There are two more short interventions, along the same lines, and then the conference is closed with a long round of applause. As I see the Albanian delegation applauding, I wonder if their applause stems from what is achieved in this conference, or that the conference is over.

Multiple sources tell me that the lack of debate in this conference is not typical of Bologna. Indeed, during my fieldwork in Albania, a former minister recalls the tough debate that he observed in previous ministerial conferences:

> I remember that in [the ministerial Conference of] Vienna there was a tough session, very tough... with extraordinary questions. And in the end, the discussion ended on the conclusion that the majority accepts that we can keep the three-year [bachelor's degree]. This is how [the conference] ended, with an obvious scepticism…
>
> (AP06, Albanian minister)

Similarly, one of the oldest country representatives in the BFUG confirms to me that previous ministerial conferences have generated much more debate:

> I think in my experience is that previous [ministerial] meetings, such as in Yerevan and Bucharest, were much more interventional by the ministers themselves. Here as least **the last session was a bit disappointing**...I think you have to be engaged and to bring forward your story here.
>
> (BP02, country representative in the BFUG)

Given the evidence of losing, presented in chapter 4, and the existence of discontent, as discussed above, the lack of voice may be related to external forces that prevent conflict and create a false sense of wide-spread consensus among the conference participants.

However, the case of the Lithuanian minister who managed to speak, but did not voice her discontent, cannot be explained by external limitations. In that case, internal factors discussed in chapter 6, may provide a better explanation. For instance, mental mind maps are often used to filter out information and provide positive feedback even for inefficient policies (Pierson, 2004). To illustrate, the following BFUG meeting in Vienna recognized that there were problems with the way in which the conference was organized, but the professional moderator was held responsible for that, for lacking the necessary skills:

> Nevertheless, the moderator's skills appeared to be inadequate for the task, and it was noted that it would be preferable for the hosting minister to chair the Ministerial Conference
>
> (BFUG, minutes of the meeting, modified on 23.09.2018, p. 5)

Moreover, a shared understanding among the policy actors has the power to alter their preferences and encourage them to act according to what they deem as appropriate for their role and identity (March & Olsen, 2013). Similarly, they accept the international hierarchy

because they see no way *that* it can be different (Gramsci, 1971). This sentiment is illustrated in the following quotation from the Albanian representative in the BFUG (AP04):

> In the end, they did it. It [online courses] was included in the declaration. I could not do much to prevent it. They did it…I told them to stipulate that it should be done according to the capacities of each country. They said - "No if we articulate it like that, nobody will implement it. Countries will not implement it".

Others talk about discussion fatigue, which makes actors give in, and accept whatever is pushed forward relentlessly:

> In the end, I think we got to a point where it was like “Don't rock the boat anymore, because we know that it will open the can of worms".
>
> (BG02 representative of students in the BFUG)

This behaviour of country representatives on the international stage is dependent on the political context back home, and the pressure (or lack of it) from domestic interest groups. In that connection, I now turn to the national context, following the way in which this policy, and the discourse that legitimizes it, travels from Paris to the periphery.

7.4 After the Conference - Policy travels

After the Paris conference, I followed up the work of both delegations as they returned home. As discussed above, there is no functional national BFUG in Albania, and there was no follow-up meeting of the delegation when they returned home. Neither was there any public report issued by the Ministry to inform stakeholders about what was discussed and decided in Paris.

The only public information available about the conference was a post in the social media profile of the deputy minister (image 7.11, below). This post of 26th May 2018, highlighted the meetings that the deputy minister had during this conference, thanked the delegation members, and provided a summary of the Paris communique as follows:

> …During these three days, special attention was paid to the implementation of the Bologna Process’ objectives, such as quality assurance, modernization and adaptation of university curricula, based on labour market objectives and demands, recognition of university curricula, new technologies in university education, **an increase of mobility** and the social dimension…



Image 7.11 A post in the deputy minister's public profile on social media 26/05/2018

Lithuania, on the other hand, organized a follow-up conference, entitled "20 years after the Sorbonne declaration Bologna Process in Lithuania and other European countries". This conference was organized by the Ministry, in cooperation with the national centre for quality assurance SKVC and the National BFUG. The first half of this conference was dedicated to international actors that played a key role in Paris, such as the Eurydice, the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG), the European University Association (UEA), and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Their aim was to discuss joint commitments adopted in Paris, focusing on better implementation at the national level. For example, three out of four presentations had "implementation" in their title, and one has "compliance" (see the agenda of the meeting in Appendix 7.2).

From Paris to Vilnius

It is the morning of 11th June 2018. I am running a couple of minutes late because I am struggling to navigate the business district of Vilnius. I am used to the old town area, where are the university buildings, but this is the modern part of the city, that was developed after the political changes of the 1990s. Big brands and newly built skyscrapers are located here.

I reach Europa square, where the "Europa tower" stands tall, as the highest skyscraper in the Baltics. The conference is held in the "Best Western" hotel, located on the other side of the

road. It is a Soviet-style building, erected in the 1970s as a functionalist hotel, privatized and refurbished after independence, and now turned into a modern hotel, representing an international brand (BW, 2020). This area of Vilnius is an illustration of the transformation of Lithuania over the past three decades, and it represents the widespread perception of Europe as associated with modernity (see chapter 5).

As I enter the conference room, I see that it resembles a typical classroom. The presenter stands next to a whiteboard and a screen for the video projector, facing an audience of academics, researchers, students, and civil servants from the Quality Assurance Agency and the Ministry of Education (Image 7.12, below).



Image 7.12 The conference room in Vilnius, where the conference was held.

I sit at the back of the room, whereas at the front I recognize all the delegation members who I met in Paris a fortnight earlier. Among them is the president of the rectors' conference, who privately was very critical about the one-directional flow of students. I believe that this event is a good chance to voice these grievances. The event starts with welcoming remarks from the minister, who emphasizes the willingness of the Ministry to reconcile international commitments with national necessities.



Image 7.13. The representative of the Eurydice presenting a colour-coded implementation map

The next speaker is the representative of Eurydice, who is presenting the Bologna implementation report discussed above. While displaying on the screen the same colour-coded implementation maps (image **7.13 above**), he notes:

> We found that in three-tier degree cycles, ECTS system and diploma supplement, we see that there are ten countries that have serious issues. With diploma supplement things look quite good [for Lithuania], **green is a good colour, red is not**. So, we see that things are pretty good.

His simplified language, “red” bad and “green” good, is a reminder of the intention to simplify complex and dense information into simple categories that encourage implementation and discourage reflection and thorough analysis of the policy and its supporting instruments.

Next, he promotes socialization and peer-learning as a way to teach countries about how to implement Bologna better by arguing that stakeholders in many countries do not fully understand what Bologna commitments entail. Then he moves to the next slide where he carefully presents Lithuania’s four-year BA degree as an issue:

> … **one issue that you might want to be thinking about** is that when you are looking at the common length of the first and second cycle together, you find that **you are in a category** when you have one of the **longest** length periods of study in the Higher Education area. Maybe this is something to think about.

This quotation reveals the tension about the length of studies discussed in chapter 6. From the very beginning, the academic community in Lithuania has not allowed the introduction of the three-year bachelor's degree that is promoted by Bologna. However, despite, or perhaps

because of retaining the traditional length of studies, Lithuania did not suffer the degree inflation of other countries, as discussed in chapter 4. Indeed, Lithuania has one of the highest employability rates for BA graduates (93%), and on average they earn 55% more than employees with a secondary degree, which is higher than the OECD average (44%) (OECD, 2019a). Therefore, it is unclear to me how the stakeholders will be persuaded that their decision to retain the four-year degree was wrong and "needs to be thought about".

Then he starts promoting online learning by presenting it as part of the modernization agenda, which is in line with the agenda-setting observed in Paris, as discussed above. Then he takes up the topic of student mobility, emphasizing that there should be even more Lithuanian students to study abroad for a full degree:

> There are two forms of mobility… degree mobility…and credit mobility…like an Erasmus exchange…What we see, because the idea, of course, of the whole **this reform is to help students to be mobile**, but, what we see… [regarding] degree mobility, meaning students who go to study for a whole program or degree in another country…**you see that numbers are not that significant**.

And then, very quickly, he mentions the issue of imbalanced mobility, but he presents it as something that cannot be solved, due to the lack of mechanisms in place:

> The other thing we should be paying attention to is [that] the **mobility flows are very imbalanced**. They...(pauses), they...You have far more people going from South to North, [and from] East to West, then the opposite, and that is something which we **haven't really got the mechanisms** in the place to impact upon.

Based on this comment, when the room is open for questions from the audience, I ask him (Image 7.14) what approaches could be adopted to find mechanisms to tackle imbalanced mobility. He provides a lengthy answer, which explains why that is something that demands a lot of work and coordination, and therefore is not going to be tackled anytime soon.



Image 7.14. Me asking questions during the Q & A session of the Conference in Vilnius. Picture published on the SKVC

The audience seems to agree with him, and the moderator, who is one of the leaders of the Lithuanian Quality Assurance centre (SKVC), is constantly nodding assent.

I then ask him one more question: “Given that this is the twentieth anniversary of Bologna, what has Lithuania gained from this process?” He replies that I should know that better. The audience laughs at his remark, which makes me uncomfortable. The moderator intervenes emphasizing that we are running out of time, and there will be no more questions from the audience. I am worried that I might have taken someone else’s opportunity to ask questions.

I double-check the agenda, and, as in Paris, there is very little time left for feedback. His presentation is planned from 9.10 to 10.**10**, whereas the next presentation is planned from 10.**10** to 10.55. So, it is left to the presenter to allow as much time as they deem necessary for a session of Questions & Answers (Q&A).

Moreover, the way in which the moderator intervened seemed a bit abrupt to me. Given her role at the SKVC, I have invited her for an interview. She did not agree to it, but having read the information sheet of my study, she wrote a long reply criticising my approach on mobility and brain drain, and defending Bologna’s contribution in making Lithuania “more open and competitive” (email correspondence LG13 06.06.2018). I wonder why she felt it was necessary to take a defensive position, instead of helping me understand what I was missing in my analysis. She probably categorized me as part of the critics who oppose European integration and "hold back progress" (see chapter 6).

The whole situation makes me uncomfortable. I feel as if I have provoked some hostility with my questions and disrupted the ruling consensus in the room. I feel judged and socially excluded, which is an illustration of the social costs of challenging the ruling consensus. As discussed in chapter 2, social pressure acts as a path-reproducing mechanism by increasing the cost of exiting. Thus, often actors feel they have to support a popular choice, in order to adjust their preferences to the expectations of others, and avoid losing legitimacy or being cast as outsiders (Sydow et al., 2009). After living this experience, I now better understand why the president of the Rector’s Conference is not voicing his discontent.

The next speaker is a BFUG representative who is lecturing on how to meet Bologna implementation challenges, which is an illustration of the peer learning strategy discussed above. She explains what was discussed in the Paris conference, updating the national audience on the recent commitments of their country. She promotes higher mobility as an aspiration that should encourage further implementation of Bologna:

> We would like to see, in a utopian Bologna process, seamless migration of students and staff and educated people across borders, but at the moment it does not happen like that. At the basis of everything we all are trying to achieve is 'mobility', like [the previous speaker] pointed out here earlier, **mobility, mobility, mobility it's really all that Bologna is about**. And still, we don't see as much mobility as we would like to see… But **in order to achieve [higher mobility], we need to commit ourselves to the mechanisms for implementation**. We need to implement together, within our countries, all of our countries, so that we can get the mobility and this international flow.

However, after she has finished discussing incentives, she resorts to pressure as an effective way to ensure compliance. Although implementation maps are often presented as simply an attempt to spread information and help governments understand their situation (EACEA, 2018), this speaker uses blunt language to show that they are indeed an instrument to pressure governments to implement Bologna, as the following quotation illustrates:

> We should be very much relying on peer support, but also on **peer pressure**, and the [Bologna implementation] report, this one, in a way, is a **mechanism of peer pressure**. You look at all these maps and... some of us went to Paris two weeks ago, and these maps were brought up, similarly as we did here today, and you see some minister [uttering a sigh] "**I don't like my country looking this colour, what can I do to change it**?" ... This is peer pressure that does work...

She finishes her presentation and opens the floor for a short Q&A session (5 minutes). This time I feel reluctant to ask questions, aso does most of the audience. There are two interventions, which nevertheless do not voice criticism but ask for help on further implementation. One is from a university teacher, who uses this opportunity to express her frustration with the stalling reforms and complains that her government is not doing enough to implement Bologna. This comment illustrates a shared understanding among stakeholders, discussed in chapter 6. They are still hopeful of a positive outcome if they do just as they are told, despite evidence showing the opposite. Moreover, they are willing to outsource the

legitimacy of governing higher education to international actors, while reducing the role of their national government.

Afterwards, we all head to the coffee break. While queuing for coffee, I approach a group of students and start an informal conversation with them. They tell me that they are invited here by their university, which has selected them based on their academic performance. Trying to understand the 'selling point' of domestic HE institutions, I ask them why they have chosen to study in Lithuania? I seem to have struck the wrong chord because this innocent question prompts an undesired reaction. They get into a defensive mode, trying to justify their decision, as if they have made a mistake, or as if this revealed their lack of capacity. It is obvious that studying abroad is a social norm (see Petzold & Peter, 2015). Thus, as discussed in chapter 6, not meeting this social expectation is often perceived as a failure to succeed in life.

I make an effort to retrieve the situation, emphasizing that I do not believe that students should necessarily study abroad if they do not want to. I explain that my point is to understand what the advantages and disadvantages are of studying in Lithuania versus studying abroad. They struggle to come up with good reasons to study in Lithuania, other than emotional and social ones: one has to look after her parents, another has a girlfriend that keeps him tied to his country. The impression is that most of them value education abroad over domestic education, and all things being equal, would have preferred to study abroad.

As I am getting my coffee, I see the minister's advisor approaching me. Since the Paris conference, we have kept in close contact. I ask him about the event, and we start discussing Bologna. He tells me that he will be the new country representative in the BFUG. Then he tells me that it baffles him why the international speakers at this conference are focusing so much on mobility while for him Bologna is just about the quality of Higher Education. I do not comment on his remarks, but I think that this discrepancy may come from a contradiction in perspectives between what national policymakers want and expect from Bologna, and what international actors want and expect. This is another example of the argument discussed in chapter 2, about giving "local meanings to global ideas" (Lingard & Ozga, 2007), which

explains how the policy elite in these countries gives new meanings to global ideas as they translate them into their local context.

Later, I approach the representative of the European University Association (EUA), who delivered a speech on the implementation of the standards and guidelines, offering the perspective of universities. I ask if the interest group she represents has any criticisms of Bologna. She assures me that universities are on board with all its policies because the EUA is representing them in the Bologna governing structures. When I ask what her biggest concern is, she complains about governments that do not respect what that they sign up for. “If they don’t implement their commitments, what is the point of signing it?” – she asks me. I do not have an answer to that rhetorical question, but I was expecting her to be concerned about universities in the losing countries that are being shut and closing their programs due to a dip in the student numbers. It looks as if these issues are not high on the EUA's agenda.

During lunch, I sit with a university professor who tells me that he encourages his own students to go and study abroad, because he feels it is ethical to offer them a better education, which, according to him, they cannot find in Lithuania. This conversation resonates with the sentiment discussed in chapter 6, where numerous academics in both countries, disillusioned with the reality in their home institutions, encourage their own students to study abroad.

Later that day, I reported the event in my fieldwork notebook:

> The main speakers were all from international bodies. They delivered long speeches on how to implement Bologna commitments better…Although the conference is called "Bologna 20 years later", there was no reflection on the national needs or domestic situation in Lithuania, and how Bologna can be beneficial to Lithuania's higher education. It actually was assumed as something that everyone knows…There was no political debate. Just a technical communication on how to implement it better. There is such a powerful consensus.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter, I show that while the Bologna agenda is negotiated and decided, social claims coming from the centre prevail over the interests of the losers. I also discuss why the losers do not resist this agenda when it goes against their interests and preferences.

I start by arguing that countries like Albania have limited capacities to defend their interests because of the quality of representation on the international stage. As the case of the Paris

Conference illustrates, the lack of organized interest groups at the national level has given leeway to the Ministry to compose delegations of actors who are not accountable to the stakeholders they claim to represent.

On the other hand, the shared understanding among the policy elite is that Bologna is a policy learning process, and therefore ministerial conferences are seen as classrooms where countries learn and are assessed, not ~~as~~ places where policies are discussed and negotiated. Moreover, there is a strong common sense that legitimizes the hierarchy within the EHEA, and actors act according to what they deem as appropriate to their role in it. As a consequence, ministers often see their role as redundant, preferring to delegate all the powers to the action elite, which has the necessary knowledge to interpret the policy and lead the implementation process. As a corollary, this concentrated power allows the action elite's worldview, preferences, and interests to go unchecked. Thus, when ministers give in to external pressure, or co-option through socialization and incentives, they steer the country towards policy commitments that do not represent its interests or may even go against them.

Moreover, I discuss how soft governing tools, such as colour-coded maps, are used to encourage policy compliance, while actors are prevented from challenging the ruling consensus (two-faces of power), through the way in which the ministerial conference is organized, and the rooms are arranged.

Finally, I observe how this policy travels and identify the key elements of the discourse that legitimizes it, drawing attention to the de-contextualized transferable 'solutions' that are offered to apparently shared policy issues. I discuss the way in which policy discourses are translated into the national context, where they face no resistance from national stakeholders, for reasons related to the political culture, a shared understanding and other path-reproducing mechanisms discussed in chapter 6.

Chapter 8 – Discussions and conclusions

"All theory, dear friend, is grey, but the golden tree of actual life springs ever green"
Goethe, 'Faust', pt.1, 1808

8.1. The research puzzle

The Bologna process (henceforth Bologna) represents a case of voluntary intergovernmental cooperation to promote higher student mobility by advocating for the removal of national barriers. This policy agenda, which encourages international competition for students, is decided collectively by the education ministers of all member states. However, as I showed in the empirical chapters, this process was initiated by four winners, and its policies do not necessarily represent the interests of the losers (chapter 7). Moreover, high outward mobility has led to high degrees of loss for the net exporting countries (chapter 1), which go beyond the numbers of students, to include economic, social and political implications (chapter 4).

Chapter five demonstrates that although both Albania and Lithuania have followed this agenda and have undertaken substantial reforms in line with Bologna commitments for more than two decades, they have not benefitted, but, instead, have incurred substantial losses. Nevertheless, they have remained loyal to this process, and have not voiced grievances, despite the availability of better alternatives (chapter 1). To restate my research puzzle: what motivates these acquiescent losers to consent to the policy agenda promoted by Bologna? To investigate that puzzle, I pursued this central research question:

Why do the losers voluntarily act against their material self-interest?

To enable the investigation, I divided that overarching question into three separate questions:

1. *Why did the losers join an international cooperation that cannot be beneficial to them?*
2. *Why do the losers stay in this cooperation despite evidence of losing?*
3. *Why do the losers not voice their discontent about this policy agenda?*

Rational choice theories, developed to explain international relations, interpret cooperation as the outcome of decisions made by rational actors who seek to maximise their utility (i.e. neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism). However, predictions based on those theoretical

assumptions do not comply with the empirical reality of the losers, who have voluntarily chosen to pursue an agenda that does not make them better off. Similarly, theories developed to explain European integration have limitations regarding Bologna, not least because it is institutionally located outside of the EU legal framework (chapter 2). Furthermore, they predict that states will exit cooperation when they are not benefitting, and voice criticism to increase their bargaining power (i.e. intergovernmentalism). Nevertheless, I have shown that the losers have remained loyal to this cooperation despite their losses, while, at the same time, refraining from voicing grievances. Similarly, these theories predict the emergence of international cooperation as a *spill-over* effect of initiatives to tackle common problems (i.e. neo-functionalism). Yet I have shown that this policy agenda has not addressed the losers' problems, and has even exacerbated some of them (chapter 4). Thus, my empirical data show the limitations of these theoretical constructs and identify the need for alternative ways of approaching this research puzzle and answering my research questions.

I have combined different theoretical approaches, discussing them in the light of my research data (see Burawoy, 2012). In chapter 2, I discuss how I approach this research puzzle from a constructivist perspective, understanding interests as constructed in social interactions. By that I mean that while actors have agency, their action or inaction is understood as a response to specific rules of appropriate behaviour, according to which they interpret their identity and role in the environment where they operate. That is why I use political ethnography to explore actors' understanding of their reality and to look at this cooperation from their perspective.
Thus, collecting evidence through a triangulation of sources, and methods, I provide a new explanation of the losers' behaviour, discussing a series of factors that account for their motivation to participate in Bologna. Although these factors are intertwined and difficult to isolate, for the sake of the analysis I will discuss the most important ones, by arranging them around two categories: i) *external and* ii) *internal factors*, as illustrated in chart 8.1 (below).

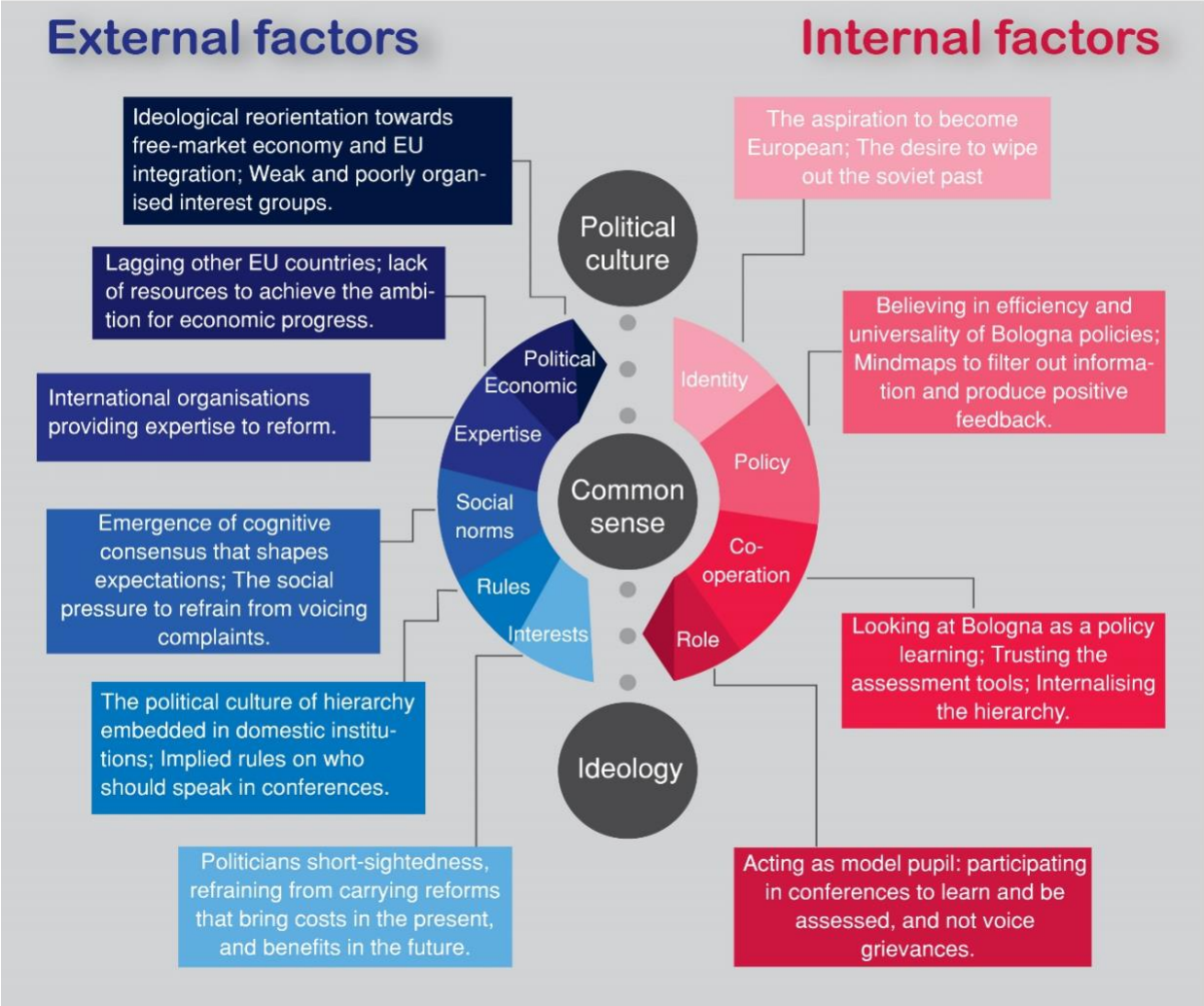


Chart 8.1 – External and internal factors that have influenced the losers' loyalty to Bologna

8.2 Making sense of the losers' behaviour

a. External factors (Path dependence)

As discussed above, Bologna is based on voluntary cooperation. Countries are represented by their ministers of education, who are formally in charge of the process. They submit the membership application, adopt the new commitments, take the lead in the implementation of the reforms, and report back to the international governing structures of Bologna, such as the ministerial conferences, the BFUG and the secretariat. Nevertheless, they have been constrained to operate within boundaries set by limited resources, to respond to institutional rules and social norms (see section b, below), and pursue a path that is defined by previous decisions. Thus, choosing Bologna over other alternatives, set in motion a process that limited their agency to choose in the future, by increasing the cost of exiting (see chart 8.2, below).



Chart 8.2 – The steps that have contributed to the Path dependence of Bologna

Understanding why the losers joined and remain loyal to Bologna requires a closer look at their national political and economic context at the time when the decision was taken. In chapter 5, I showed that in the early 1990s, the losers were in dire straits politically and economically. They were significantly lagging behind most of the developed European economies, while the ideology of the previous regime had reached a breaking point. Thus, they embraced an ideological re-orientation, from centrally planned to free-market economies.

This transition, which was underpinned by ideas of freedom of movement and competition, was encouraged by the prospect of 'joining the rest of Europe' and becoming prosperous 'like Swedes' (chapter 5). Thus, European integration and neoliberal reforms were understood as intertwined, as revealed by cross-country surveys of the time (Tucker et al., 2002).

In conjunction with these transformations, a new way of thinking and speaking about education emerged. States, institutions and individuals were required to respond to this new reality and become competitive. Universities were to become independent of the government and respond to the needs of the emerging market. At the same time, education had to take a vital role in the economy of knowledge and innovation (Nokkala, 2005). In this context, Bologna was presented as the only way towards the modernisation of education (Fejes, 2008).

However, the education sector in the losing countries was underfunded when faced with the need for profound reforms (see Chankseliani, 2017; Silova, 2009; Hogan-Brun, 2007). Moreover, as discussed in chapter 5, both countries have had limited capacities and experience to develop their own policies (see Mundy et al., 2016). Accordingly, they started seeking membership in international organisations (e.g. the EU, and OECD) where they could be supported and guided in the process of reform. However, this collaboration with international organisations has opened the door to the influence of global agendas on national policies in education, including in the two case study countries. On the one hand, membership in these organisations entailed the adoption of agreements that paved the way towards Bologna. To illustrate, the Council of Europe’s Treaty nr.165, Lisbon Convention (1997) on recognition of higher education qualifications is one of the main pillars of Bologna (chapter 6).

On the other hand, these organisations have played a central role in steering policy compliance, through discourse, regulatory instruments, financial incentives, integration of elites, and induced competition. By helping in purchasing the necessary expertise for the governments, these organisations have provided experts that promote policy solutions that are in tune with their interests and preferences. These experts, who belong to the action elite (chapter 2), have presented the ministers with a limited repertoire of policies to choose from, offering Bologna as a decontextualised policy solution that would produce the same outcome everywhere (chapter 6). For instance, in another study, I have shown how international experts, paid by the World Bank, travelled around presenting governments with one-size-fits-all policy solutions, despite evidence of their inefficiency in similar contexts (Shabani, 2014).

The role of the action elite is crucial in understanding the losers' preferences towards Bologna, for they have played a key role as gatekeepers of travelling policy (see Ozga & Jones 2006). Moreover, since their knowledge and expertise has been indispensable for the process, they have been given governing responsibilities that limit the role of the ministers (chapter 6). Similarly, the process of integration of elites (chapter 5) has allowed domestic groups to operate directly at the international level, circumventing the government, and even exerting pressure over it to keep up with international commitments related to Bologna (chapter 7).

This integration process makes it difficult for governments to exit from the path of Bologna, for it has increased the legal, political, and social costs. Once Bologna commitments enter the national legislation, reversing them requires the engagement of the government and the parliament, taking this decision away from the hands of the minister. Similarly, it would require the collaboration of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which have to undo or redo significant reforms in terms of restructuring (chapter 6). Furthermore, Bologna has created a new environment where actors are able to interact and advance their interests. Thus, reversing from the path of Bologna might require disentangling these interests that have emerged over the past two decades (e.g. the emergence of International Branch Campuses).

On the other hand, there is a dependence on ideas that gain legitimacy and change expectations. As discussed below, the discourse employed to legitimise these reforms shapes

how actors perceive education, including the way it should be measured and the outcomes that matter. Consequently, while the expectations of the policy elite and the publics change, it becomes difficult for politicians to deviate without paying political costs. In other words, the government of a losing country that exits Bologna will be perceived as failing to keep up with the European standards and unable to advance the national education system (chapter 6). Moreover, by being portrayed as progress (e.g. "evolution of the mindset"), it becomes difficult to criticise these standardising practices without risk of being labelled as regressive, and against modernity (e.g. 'outside of the march of history'). As a corollary of these social costs, I have shown that even powerful actors, like ministers and Prime Ministers, refrain from voicing in public criticism about Bologna that they share in private (chapter 6). The following quotation during my interview with a Lithuanian minister illustrates this self-censorship:

> **Question:** *If you would have to choose between the Western and the Soviet education model, which one would you prefer?*
>
> I prefer, as a model, the western [education] model, of course. However, maybe the question is in general, which model is better, not what I prefer. I prefer it because we are in the European Union and for me there is no question to what model to prefer [smiles and pauses. Contemplates his/her answer for a while, and then continues] I think the western model would be better.
>
> (LP02, Lithuanian minister)

In other words, exiting the path of Bologna carries the probability of long-term benefits and the certainty of present costs for the incumbent minister. Thus, it is not a viable alternative, given the ‘short-sightedness’ of politicians (Pierson, 2004), who prefer short-term solutions that help them come to and remain in power (Klein & Marmor, 2011). This ‘short-sightedness’ could be overcome by interest groups, which operate in a much longer time span. However, as shown in chapter 6, both countries have poorly organised interest groups, which have limited access to policymaking. Moreover, they are represented by unaccountable elites who often pursue their narrow personal interest, while speaking in their name (chapter 7). The publics on the other side, have lost hope that things will get better anytime soon, so they are prone to *quick fixes*, such as the availability of accessing education services provided in other countries (chapter 6). That sentiment is particularly expressed among the country’s elite, who are in a better position to influence the government’s agenda (chapter 5).

In sum, when confronted with numerous choice nodes, the ministers have responded to a myriad of external factors in deciding to jump on the path of Bologna and remain in it for more than two decades. Moreover, this cooperation is path-dependent, which means that every step influences future decisions by increasing the cost of switching to alternative paths. Nevertheless, although these external factors limit the scope of their choices, the ministers still have the agency to respond differently to them. As discussed in chapter 1, throughout this process, the losers have had other alternatives, which could have been even more efficient in responding to the same factors and circumstances. Thus, understanding why they have chosen this course of action, over better alternatives, requires further investigation into the way in which they perceive and interpret their reality.

b. Internal factors (Rules of appropriate behaviour)

In the above section, I discussed the external factors that have limited the losers' freedom to choose regarding Bologna. Here I discuss the internal factors that have motivated their action and inaction, by exploring how actors understand themselves, this policy agenda, this international cooperation, and their role in it. The losers' behaviour is understood as the aggregate of decisions and actions of people who operate in three layers, including above and below the national government. They go into meetings, take decisions, and adopt policies, guided by a sense of what is appropriate to say and do. However, while their behaviour produces outcomes at both national and international level, the focus of this study is on the latter. Moreover, as indicated earlier, I approach this study from a constructivist point of view (chapter 2), and therefore actors, including the ministers, are understood to interpret reality through the lens of political culture, *common sense* and other ideological commitments.

To begin with, the losers' behaviour towards Bologna has been primarily influenced by the way in which they understand who they are, and whom they aspire to become. As discussed above, in the early 1990s, the old order was challenged, and its ideology was unable to provide adequate answers, encouraging the policy elites of the losing countries to reconstruct their identity (see March & Olsen 2011; Wollmann 2006). This identity formation process was guided by a pressing need to wipe out the Soviet legacy, and it was underpinned by the

aspiration to reconnect with European society (Chapter 5), or as they would put it: ‘return to Europe’ (Hyde-Price, 1996). This powerful drive led the policy elites in both countries to adopt uncritically many reforms that came from Europe, including changing the time zone in line with “European time” (Pavlovaite, 2003). Congruently, Bologna was embraced as a European process, and that was enough to assume that it would be beneficial. Moreover, the whole integration process created a sense of movement and urgency to transform, which does not encourage reflection on the efficiency of these policies (chapter 5). Thus, while the efficiency of these policies was presumed, actors were merely concerned about being left out, or behind.

Secondly, the policy elite in both countries embraced a set of ideas promulgated by international organisations, on how education should develop (chapter 4). The *cognitive consensus* (Grundmann & Stehr, 2012) on the efficiency and universality of these policies persuaded the national policy elites that Bologna had the potential to improve the quality of their higher education. Challenging these beliefs is difficult because the time-distance between action and outcomes blurs the causal links between them. Moreover, actors on the receiving end often see them only in isolated elements, missing the broader picture. However, even when evidence of losing is presented as cumulative (chapter 4), it still gets filtered out through mind-maps, producing *positive feedback* that reinforces existing and deep-seated beliefs (chapter 2). In chapter 6, I showed that actors in the losing countries do not see the link between the policy agenda of Bologna and high outward mobility rates for their country. When they do, they blame each other for inept or partial implementation of Bologna, refusing to question its ability to deliver the same outcomes everywhere. Consequently, information that could have reduced their motivation, encourages further implementation of Bologna policies.

Thirdly, in chapter 7, I showed that the losers see Bologna as a policy learning process. Hence, they jumped on the bandwagon expecting to be helped in identifying their problems, in learning how to fix them, and to be assessed on their progress (chapter 5). Accordingly, they embraced the role of ‘model pupils’ (see Rinne et al., 2004) by downplaying their challenges and overstating their performance, instead of voicing discontent with this policy agenda.

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 4, there are several instruments developed to measure the Bologna implementation progress, which serve as soft governing tools to promote policy congruence and induce competition between countries (Ozga, 2019; Grek, 2009). Nevertheless, given their understanding of this process and their role, many actors have employed these instruments uncritically, which has encouraged them to judge themselves based on league tables and internalise their position as inferior to other better-performing countries (chapter 7). Congruently, the losers do not take responsibility for updating this common policy agenda, for they believe this is the job of other, more powerful actors. That belief is encouraged by a political culture that excludes actors from decision-making and weakens their civic responsibility (chapter 6). Thus, contrary to what Hirschman (1978) predicts, they do not voice discontent, while remaining loyal to the process. A case in point is the Albanian minister who, although vested with formal powers as the co-chair of the BFUG, interpreted their role as negligible. This interpretation of reality is encouraged by *common sense* (Gramsci, 1971) which makes them feel powerless to change the way things are. Consequently, the losers are persuaded that there is no alternative (TINA, chapter 2), and their situation is just 'the natural course of history', failing to take responsibility (chapter 6).

To conclude, the decisions to join and remain in this cooperation cannot be explained as the sum of a series of rational choices made by well-informed policy-makers who are seeking to maximise their utility, but as a way to respond to a perceived role (e.g. 'model student') and to an aspired identity, such as becoming a European 'modern state' (see Mundy et al., 2016; Drezner, 2001). Thus, although Bologna may not respond to the material interests of the losers, it does respond to their aspirations and values (see Harvey, 2005). Consequently, their decisions to join and remain loyal to this cooperation can be explained by theories that focus on identity, ideology and culture (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2017; MacFarlane, 2015), and those that emphasise the persuasive and attractive power of Europeanisation (Lawn & Grek 2012).

c. Answering my research questions

In the light of what was discussed above, the losers' decision to join Bologna has been dictated by their political and economic context in the early 1990s. Previous decisions, relating to

ideological re-orientation and new alliances, placed these countries into the European integration path. Moreover, the work of the international organisations, which encouraged elite integration, made such a decision a 'natural' course to pursue. These external circumstances were combined with a powerful drive of the policy elites to embrace a new European identity. Thus, the losers joined Bologna because their identity formation was more important to them than their material self-interest. In that sense, joining Bologna was motivated by the aspiration to become a proper European, Western, democratic, and modern state. However, they have also been persuaded about the universality and efficiency of these policies. In other words, they did not think that Bologna would make them worse off, because they assumed that it contributes to their political and economic progress, and did not challenge that assumption.

Secondly, the losers' loyalty to Bologna can be explained through path-reproducing mechanisms that, along the way, have increased the costs of exiting. On the one hand, there is an ideational path that is laid down by the discourse that legitimises these reforms. Accordingly, the shared understanding of how education should develop has shaped the expectations of actors on the performance of government. Thus, going against this *cognitive consensus* brings high costs that even prime ministers cannot bear. On the other hand, previous commitments have entered the national legal framework and have encouraged substantial legal and administrative reforms. Thus, switching paths would require tremendous efforts to undo and redo substantial transformation, which demands a broad consensus among policy actors. However, few national actors would decide to switch to another path. While politicians are short-sighted and prefer to avoid long-term benefits that come with costs in the present, interest groups are poorly organised and represented by unaccountable elites.

Finally, the losers have not voiced their discontent because doing so would be inconsistent with their understanding of this process and their role in it. On the one hand, they have responded to the rules of what is appropriate behaviour for a 'model student' who participates in a policy learning process. Congruently, in the Bologna conference, they come to take notes on what they should do to improve their performance while expecting to be graded on their

progress. On the other hand, their political culture has contributed to *common sense* that looks at Bologna as hierarchical cooperation, where they take a secondary role. Consequently, they do not feel the responsibility to speak up and update the common agenda because they believe that more powerful actors should do that. At the same time, they have accepted their role in this hierarchy, not because they are happy with it, but because they cannot see how it can be different. Thus, although being in the driving seat, they perceive this process to resemble a self-driving car, which is moving towards a better world, and all they can do is to keep going, while avoiding the danger of falling out of it.

d. Differences between two case studies

While both countries share many features, there are some differences between them. However, these are differences that are not substantial, because the overwhelming powerful drivers that have encouraged them to act against their self-interests are shared by the two cases. Indeed, this difference strengthens my arguments further by emphasising the centrality of the factors that I have discussed above.

Firstly, Lithuanian students and academics have been more successful in defending their immediate interest, which prevented the introduction of the four-year bachelor's degree (chapter 6). In Albania this resistance was much weaker, leading many academics and university leaders to implement Bologna against their initial preferences. This difference in the way national actors responded to the same policy agenda, shows that countries have had the agency to respond in different ways to the external pressures. Thus, as long as resistance has been possible, their policy compliance is more the outcome of persuasion than coercion.

Secondly, domestic tertiary education offers better job prospects in Lithuania than it does in Albania. Nevertheless, as in Albania, the demand for tertiary education in Lithuania has continued to decline, while more Lithuanian students choose to study abroad. This difference without a difference shows that the prospect of emigration, and the reputation of their education systems, act as powerful drivers. Thus, regardless of how well the labour market

values graduates at home, students will continue to leave as long as the losers engage in facilitating the mobility of human capital, while education abroad turns into a social norm.

Thirdly, as discussed in chapter 5, there is a significant difference in the economic and political progress made by each of the countries, over the past two decades. However, this difference shows that while the education system depends on the country's level of development, it does not necessarily improve automatically when the country progresses economically. It shows that it is hard for the losers to win the competition with developed EU countries if they do not improve the quality and the reputation of their higher education. Thus, even after the country progresses economically, the one-directional student flow is retained, because domestic students continue to have good reasons to study abroad, and even more, means to afford it. Furthermore, while Albania is still far from EU membership, Lithuania has become a member of the EU and OECD, being in a better place to defend its interests on the international stage and becoming more attractive to international students. However, the above arguments about the centrality of the logic of appropriateness are strengthened when we see how Lithuania's improved international position has not increased its power to influence Bologna's agenda to its national advantage, nor its attractiveness to international students.

8.3 The research contribution

This study makes a theoretical contribution by addressing a particular case of international cooperation that foregrounds a puzzle that is neglected or inadequately addressed by most theories of international relations. Often interests and rules of appropriate behaviour overlap, encouraging actors to rationalise decisions that are taken for other reasons and blurring our understanding of what motivates cooperation. Thus, this case, in which actors pursue the logic of appropriate behaviour, even when it goes against their material interests, offers a good test of theories, exposing the limits of rational choice theories to explain the motivation for international cooperation. Moreover, this case contributes to a reconstruction of theories developed to explain European integration, because it represents an idiosyncratic case that is institutionally located neither inside the EU legal framework nor outside its political influence.

Secondly, seeing the social, the cultural and the historical aspects as having extraordinary importance in explaining why states act in a particular way, this study calls into question some very simplified explanations of motives and behaviour of actors, institutions and states. It shows that consensus is manufactured by actors who promulgate ideas and is maintained by persuading those who are losing to comply with policies and mobilise local resources. It sheds light on the influence that identity and political culture have in understanding the interaction between global discourses and historically embedded ideas. To that end, this study responds to Balzer and Martens' (2004) plea for more empirical case studies to explore how opinion formation has been effective in influencing national policy-making.

Thirdly, by using Political Ethnography, I have provided empirical evidence for some theoretical arguments that are often assumed but empirically understudied. For instance, international policy literature has discussed the diminishing role of national governments, but that is often assumed rather than researched. Similarly, enactment of global agendas in education is assumed to represent a consensus from nation-states, without explaining if that is achieved through coercion or manipulation (Ozga, 2018). To that end, this study contributes to the general understanding of how consensus is manufactured and maintained even when it seems unlikely. It shows how an inefficient path can be pursued, over better alternatives, because actors get entrenched into path reproducing mechanisms. Similarly, it shows how the shift from government to governance produces policy outcomes, for which few actors if any, feel responsible. As such it follows the Lingard's (2000) recommendation to study how national agendas respond to pressures from above, and Dale's (1999) suggestion to study the way in which policies travels from the global to the national context.

Fourthly, by focusing on Albania and Lithuania, this study contributes to bringing the voices of the “periphery” to a theoretical and political debate that tends to be EU-centric. As discussed earlier, the losers of Bologna have received very little attention in the education policy literature. Furthermore, the relationship between the European core countries and the periphery is underexplored by students of international relations. For instance, while several

authors have observed the TINA effect and path dependency in the core countries (see Omobowale *et al*., 2008; Munck, 2003), the impact of these phenomena in the periphery of Europe have drawn very little, if any, attention from students of European politics.

Finally, this study contributes to the existing debate on the efficiency of development policies for the periphery of Europe. The research findings discussed here might encourage some actors to question the ramifications of implementing uncritically policy ideas promulgated by international organisations, or to question the efficiency of global agendas in education. However, the aim here has not been to judge the merits of the losers' decisions regarding Bologna, but to understand what motivates them to make such decisions. In other words, while it does not provide a conclusive answer to which is the best alternative for the losers, rather it shows that there is a lack of debate about alternatives, and that the decisions are not taken based a rationalist cost and benefit analysis, but based on similarity and congruence.

8.4 Limitations and new avenues of research

Although the findings discussed above shed light on political processes that go beyond Bologna, they also have limitations even within that context. Firstly, even though I have discussed Europeanisation, I have not delved enough into the role of international organisations such as the OECD and the EU (i.e. the Commission) in this cooperation. Similarly, while taking the losers' perspective, I have not discussed in great details the level of implementation of Bologna policies at the national level. For that purpose, I have referred to the evidence provided in the Bologna implementation reports.

Secondly, although the competition in higher education is very broad, including competition for grants and academics, in this study, I am primarily focused on the competition for students. Similarly, I have focused merely on the competition between states, since I am trying to understand why countries participate in this intergovernmental cooperation. However, I am aware of the significant importance that international competition among HEIs is having in shaping the landscape of higher education in Europe and beyond (see Musselin, 2018).

Thirdly, in this study, I have not confined myself to critical discourse analysis. This decision is influenced by time constraints and limited resources to process the vast amount of data that I have collected during my fieldwork, which included hundreds of interview transcripts, documents and newspapers from various languages (chapter 3). Nevertheless, I have consulted the influential work of Ruth Wodak, who has used critical discourse analysis to investigate how actors employ the global discourse on education policies (see Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Fairclough, 2013). Hence, I have analysed the discourse employed by policy actors by bringing the whole range of analysis, breaking down texts, and looking behind the surface. To that end, there are new avenues of research by using critical discourse analysis to bring our understanding further regarding this interaction between global agendas and national contexts. To illustrate, I have found that often the discourse employed by national actors is filled with concepts that are quite empty in terms of the results that they bring to the losers while benefitting the winners, who are already in advanced highly marketised and highly competitive positions (chapter 4). However, while national actors feel a need to embrace global slogans about marketisation and competition, there is still an attachment to old ideas, despite them seeming to have been obliterated by new ideological principles. For instance, while they were ardent supporters of the knowledge economy, they did not see knowledge as an economic source, and they still thought education should be a publicly subsidised service. Finally, based on what I have argued here, it is worth investigating the continuation of this process in the future. As Maassen and Musselin (2009) have argued, Europeanisation processes of higher education and EU integration, continue to co-produce norms and decisions. Therefore, the relationship between the winners and losers is far from static. Moreover, it becomes of paramount importance to study how this relationship will evolve in the light of the recent political developments in Europe, such the rise of nationalist populism in the core EU countries, and the dimming of EU integration light in the periphery of Europe.

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