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ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Changing Role of Greek Universities

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ABSTRACT

This article will attempt to analyse the changes currently under way in higher education in Greece, in particular concerning the programmes of study offered. These changes seem to be having a decisive impact on the institutional and administrative structure of Greek universities. The main characteristics of these changes are greater diversity and flexibility of programmes. First of all, the public targeted seems to be changing in two ways. Universities are trying to address a much broader range of age groups, and they are also targeting groups with different education levels, for example, by participating in programmes aimed at combating social exclusion. Next, university departments, which formerly played a predominant role in the functioning of universities, have gradually become less important as initiatives by individual teachers and intra- and/or inter-university co-operation among groups of teachers have developed. At the same time, the fact that some programmes of study are now funded by different sources has fundamentally altered the traditional relations within the university and has opened up a new labour market in universities that is independent of the Ministry of Education. Universities also face competition from various other types of tertiary education institutions and from the different informal and flexible programmes that they themselves organise. Consequently, Greek universities appear to be trying to find their identity and role in a rapidly changing society.

Greek universities are currently undergoing profound changes. These changes are both rapid and multidimensional and are fundamentally transforming the traditional organisation and functioning of universities. In this article, we shall focus on the changes in the programmes of study offered by universities that are having institutional and administrative repercussions on how they operate.

Of course, since these changes are quite recent and are sometimes still under way, it is not possible to conduct a full-scale assessment or analysis. We shall

therefore confine ourselves to making a systematic presentation of these changes and to addressing aspects that currently seem to be unclear, problematic and at times contradictory.

This reform and restructuring of the university is clearly not unique to Greece. In recent years, both major international organisations (OECD, UNESCO, etc.) and international university organisations (CRE, EAIR, etc.) have devoted a great deal of work to the situation of universities [EEC/TFHR (Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth) 1990; Borrero Cabal, 1995; OCDE, 1996]. At the same time, the European Commission (EC) has implemented an educational policy based on the Maastrich Treaty (Articles 126 and 127, but also 118 and 123) which radically affects the structure and functioning of national education systems at all levels, including the university (Panethimitakis *et al.*, 1997).

The Greek government seems to be accepting EU policy without reservation either by choice (Simitis, 1997; IPEPT, 1997; Stangos, 1998) or due to institutional obligations, *i.e.* the Maastrich Treaty (IPEPT, 1994) or for strategic reasons in order to ensure that it receives EU funding (Greek Ministry of Labour, 1994; Stamelos, 1997). This approach seems to have resulted in some serious institutional contradictions and in decisions being made without prior consultation with the institutions concerned.

An example of these contradictions is provided by Law 2327/95, under which graduates of Institutes of Technological Education (ITE, BAC + 3 years) are allowed to enrol in Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS) programmes in universities (BAC + 4 years). Yet despite this change, the entrance examinations for ITE graduates who wish to enter the second year of the university have not been eliminated. As a result, an ITE graduate can enrol in DAS level studies in a university department (in general), but is also entitled to take the special university entrance exams for ITE graduates. Graduates who pass the exam may enrol in the second year of university, but only in departments offering programmes in the same field as their previous studies.

A case of a decision being made without prior consultation is illustrated by the reaction of universities to Initiative 3.1 (on the extension of Tertiary Education-New Programmes of Study) of the Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Education (EPEAEK), an EU-funded programme of the Education Ministry: "the implementation of such a major project without consulting the universities and institutional bodies (*e.g.* the University Council) constitutes a violation of institutional rights...".

Until recently, Greek universities determined the programmes of study offered, with departments as the basic organisational units. Each department encompassed a field of knowledge (Law 1268/82, Article 6.2) and organised a long-term programme of study (lasting 4 academic years) leading to a degree recognised

by the State. Moreover, within the Greek tradition, departments only rarely offered third-cycle programmes (DAS), since the doctoral thesis was prepared on a highly individual and personalised basis. The predominant body within a department was its General Assembly (GA).

This linear, rigid and one-dimensional model of functioning currently seems to be changing into a complex, multidimensional and much more flexible model, in which departments with their GAs are no longer the dominant bodies.

The existing model is being extended and diversified with the development and generalisation of DAS programmes, and departments and their GAs no longer have a monopoly on the establishment of DAS programmes. A DAS may now be established through inter-departmental and/or inter-university co-operation within Greece or with foreign partners. What is more, this co-operation may be established by a group of teachers acting independently as well as by decision of a GA.

Secondly, through each university's Research Board, chaired by the Vice-Rector for Financial Affairs (a body that gives universities greater autonomy through the income generated by universities' participation in various research programmes), it is now possible to create programmes at different levels, with or without the agreement of the GA of one or more departments, in one or more universities. These may be short, medium or long programmes. Moreover, they may lead either to an official diploma (as for "free choice" programmes [PSE], programmes for the enhancing the skills of primary school teachers who are graduates of the former Pedagogical Academies, etc.) or a mere attestation of study. This attestation may be professionally oriented (such as those for programmes for "retraining" primary school teachers with non-university diplomas, continuing training programmes for teachers, etc.) or may lead to a simple attestation without a clear professional value [such as attestations from a university Vocational Training Centre (KEK)].

Thirdly, under the EU Socrates Programme, through the International Relations Units of Universities and "Socrates Contracts", university teachers who so wish can establish European programmes of studies at various levels (CDI and CDA) without going through their departments.

Fourthly, through the various university research institutes and research centres in co-operation with certain ministries (*i.e.* the Ministry of Labour, International Affairs, etc.), it is possible to develop programmes targeting individual groups (such as foreign residents).

Lastly, through institutions that are linked to the university (*i.e.* teachers' training colleges, institutions for the continuing training of primary school teachers, etc.), a university department or an inter-departmental co-operation scheme or a group of university teachers can establish programmes of study and/or practical training (*i.e.* continuing training programmes for primary school teachers).

It is therefore clear that Greek universities are changing. University departments no longer define themselves unilaterally through a programme of study, and they are losing their monopoly over creating programmes. Individual teachers, schools and inter-university partnerships now have a broad range of possibilities for setting up programmes. Ties between teachers and their departments seem to be loosening, inasmuch as most of a teacher's university activities may be unknown to the GA of his or her department. Lastly, teachers may be running programmes in the department's buildings of which most teachers are unaware. For example, at present a teacher in educational sciences may be teaching in one or more programmes of conventional studies, "free choice" studies, retraining of primary school teachers with non-university diplomas, continuing training, all sorts of seminars lasting different lengths of time, international studies at various levels, and of course he or she may also be supervising or advising students preparing doctoral dissertations. This means that only the courses taught in conventional programmes necessarily come under the supervision of the GA and are known to all its members. Everything else can either be run through the GA or independently. Moreover, in cases in which the GA organises a "non-conventional" programme, all the department's teachers may not be required to participate in it. The practical problems raised by this situation are far from negligible, as is shown by the internal circular sent by the Chairman of the department of Educational Sciences at the University of Patras: "teachers in the department are asked to inform the department of the educational activities they are conducting in the department's classrooms so that the necessary planning may be carried out" (circular of 24/3/98).

Consequently, a department's title now only refers to its programme of conventional studies. The other programmes offered (whether they lead to an official diploma or merely an attestation) do not necessarily reflect the scientific and institutional definition of the department. This has led to an informal erosion (since the legislation has not been amended) of departments' control of their collective identity, in favour of greater specialisation on the part of teachers. This trend increases teachers' freedom by giving them broad leeway to initiate programmes. Thus the system has become significantly more flexible and a very broad range of educational services are offered by a department's teachers or by groups of teachers in one or more universities (at least by those who are interested in this kind of activity). This is clearly seen in the new "free choice" programmes (PSE) or the DAS programmes adopted by the Ministry of Education.

These developments also point to a second change. Since many departments have a limited number of teachers, it is highly unlikely that all these programmes will be taught only by the teachers in the department, which means that a new and dynamic labour market is opening up within the university. As universities accept and implement programmes funded by various so-called "non-traditional" sources, this market will expand continually and will offset the shortage of new university

posts established by the Ministry. But this situation raises at least two recurrent questions. Firstly, what diplomas should be required of teachers in these programmes (*i.e.* what level of studies)? Secondly, what labour rights will these employees have? The first question refers to the current practice of employing Fstudents to teach these courses, whether they are preparing a doctoral thesis, enrolled in DAS programmes or even only graduates of various university programmes. The second question concerns the experience of contract teachers in universities, who have the status of “temporary teachers” under Presidential Decree (PD) 407/80, and the extremely late payments to them in the various programmes. Nor is the international experience in this regard any more reassuring, as the case of *penenes* in Spain clearly demonstrates. Thus experience shows that this is a highly insecure type of professional relationship, in which contract teachers are not even entitled to regular payment (Marti Font, 1996; Liatsou, 1996; *Eleitherotipia*, 1997; Carabaña, 1998).

A third change seems to be the considerable diversification of the public being taught by universities. On the one hand, universities are trying to teach a much broader spectrum of ages, and they are targeting groups with different educational levels on the other. The first case refers mainly to “lifelong education/training” programmes, through which the university is adapting to the general trends and requirements of our time. But the second case has introduced a completely new dimension inasmuch as the university is teaching groups that do not necessarily hold a baccalaureate [end of secondary school degree], since the programmes initiated by the vocation training centres (KEK) aimed at combating social exclusion are in principle intended for people with sub-baccalaureate educational levels.

A fourth field in which problems have arisen is due to the different kinds of diplomas and attestations granted by universities. Universities are under pressure to include certain of them among the formal criteria used in selecting among applicants to conventional programmes, and this is a genuine problem that must be solved (*i.e.* in the case of DAS programmes).

Until recently, the university mainly granted specific degrees recognised by the State.¹ But with the growing variety of programmes offered, universities now also grant attestations that have a somewhat vague legal status and are of very different practical value.

Universities are also undergoing two-fold pressure to take non-university diplomas or the attestations they themselves grant into account when selecting among applicants for the various university programmes, whether they are conventional or not. The first source of pressure stems from the conflictual relations existing between universities and the ITEs. This situation was created by Law 2327/95, which gave ITE graduates the right to apply for DAS programmes in universities, and by the criteria laid down for programme funding (*i.e.* within EPEAEK, “free

choice” programmes, DAS, professionally oriented programmes for the continuing training of secondary teachers, etc.).

Furthermore, the fact that ITEs have developed Master's programmes has radically altered the structure of tertiary education by depriving universities of the prerogative of granting distinctive diplomas and in fact jeopardises the importance of universities as autonomous institutions.

This education policy has no doubt been influenced by the EU's policy, as it has been defined in certain working texts, both official (Commission of the European Communities, 1991) or otherwise (IRDAC, 1991), since the beginning of the 1990s. Under this policy the expression “tertiary education” has replaced the traditional names of the institutions that make up tertiary education in order to make them more uniform. However, the initial model, *i.e.* the United Kingdom's experience with polytechnics, is radically different from the respective Greek experience. In Greece, ITEs were never connected with universities and had a very different purpose from universities. Moreover, it was because of this difference that ITEs had been funded by the World Bank, with a view to filling a gap in the Greek education system (World Bank, 1980). For this reason, the content of their studies was and still is oriented more towards vocational training than research. In addition, the educational level of their teachers is very different from that of university teachers. Lastly, studies in ITEs are still shorter (3 years). To show the current contradictions of the education system, it suffices to ask the following question: why would applicants choose to attend a Polytechnic School Department with a programme lasting 5 years, when they can choose an equivalent three-year programme in an ITE and then enrol in a DAS in Greece or abroad after graduating?²

In addition to the problems stemming from EU policy, Greek universities also face a specifically Greek problem, *i.e.* competition from a type of private education institution (Centres of Liberal Studies, CLS) operating outside the official education system. Recently these institutions have begun to co-operate with foreign universities (mainly in the United Kingdom, but also in Eastern European countries) and can grant various levels of diplomas from these universities (Bachelor's and Master's degrees, PhD). The Greek State does not recognise these diplomas, for in Greece private universities are not authorised under the constitution, but nevertheless the State does not prohibit this kind of “co-operation”. As a result, there is no type of monitoring or assessment of the functioning, educational activities or teaching staff of these institutions. This has led to the labour market being invaded by holders of these degrees (supposedly from UK universities, for example) of highly dubious quality and that are naturally held in low esteem. This has resulted in a contradictory and confused situation with respect to the recognition of diplomas within the EU. At the same time, it raises a clear and pressing issue regarding the quality of EU university diplomas.

At the same time, the uncontrolled operating of CLSs erodes the structure of the education system and devalues the education process. For instance, in their publicity these institutions promise working people without university diplomas that they will be able to enter a Master's degree programme.³ They recognise two years of study in IEKs (vocational training institutes – a type of public or private non-sequential education institution intended for baccalaureate-holders or those who have completed their compulsory education) as equivalent to years at university and propose to IEK graduates that they continue their “university” studies in order to obtain a Bachelor's or Master's degree (supposedly from a UK university).⁴ Lastly, they offer university and ITE graduates the option of enrolling for a diploma at either the Master's or PhD level.⁵

Be this as it may, it is odd that the universities have either not reacted to these developments or have reacted ineffectively. At times they have even accepted this situation tacitly in order to obtain funding for their programmes. Of course, some institutions, such as the Athens Polytechnic School or the University of Patras, have reacted more vigorously than others (Phlessa, 1998). But it is unsure whether this was an independent reaction on the part of these universities or a reaction of professors who are members of professional associations, such as the Greek Chamber of Engineers (TEE). The TEE is probably the only professional association that follows, understands and regularly and conscientiously takes a stand regarding the changes that have occurred (I Imera, 1998). Consequently, defending the professional rights of university graduates is the major challenge facing the university, which will determine the future and status of the university in the years to come, and the education system must be reformed and rationalised in this perspective. For example, what are the qualifications required in the teaching profession? How are they acquired? Who can work as a teacher and where? Why, for a single profession, such as nursing, are there currently schools of such different levels (*i.e.* universities, ITEs, vocational training institutes – IEK, technical and vocational lycea – TEL, and vocational schools – TES?).

The recent adoption of a common charter by the ministers of four European countries (*Le Monde*, 1998) on the harmonisation of university diplomas (bachelor's after three years, master's after five years, doctorate after eight years), will in all likelihood influence EU educational policy in coming years, which will in turn influence Greek policy. This may well lead to a major upheaval in the organisation of Greek universities and sharp tension between universities and ITEs and vigorous reactions on the part of professional organisations regarding professional rights.

However, competition from other tertiary education institutions is not the only pressure felt by universities, for they must also face the pressure created by the informal attestations they grant. This is due to the funding criteria of EPEAEK programmes, which promote including these attestations among the criteria used in selecting among applicants for official programmes: “Departments responsible

for the project must (...) state the conditions in which attestations of study shall be taken into account in admitting students to the DAS programmes of partner institutions" (EPEAEK, Initiative 1.3a "Continuing training programme for secondary teachers", chapter "Criteria for evaluating projects"). But it is obvious that the design, content, implementation and evaluation of official programmes are completely different from their equivalent in informal programmes leading to a mere attestation.

Another field in which problems have arisen is universities' participation in programmes funded by various ministries other than the Ministry of Education. It is obvious that universities belong to the formal, sequential system supervised by the Ministry of Education. This is a longstanding tradition, and universities have developed their goals, characteristics, rules of operation and specific identity within this framework. But when universities co-operate with another ministry (such as the Labour Ministry in a programme for combating social exclusion), problems can potentially arise inasmuch as these ministries are not required to follow the priorities, approaches and rules prevailing in universities. This poses a serious problem for the organisation and functioning of universities.

In conclusion, there is every indication that Greek universities are changing, like all education systems. This is a logical development inasmuch as the education system is a social institution that must meet the needs of a given society in a specific historical period. Thus, in a rapidly changing world in which ways of life are undergoing radical change, in which the organisation of social and working life is being completely altered by technological innovations and new products and the globalisation of the labour market, the traditional clearly structured and sequential education system is "exploding", breaking up and being transformed into parallel, successive and intercommunicating lifelong learning networks. As a result, the education process, which formerly took place in a linear fashion during a period of schooling followed by a well-defined professional life, is undergoing fundamental changes. And this is obviously affecting universities.

But until recently universities played a concrete and well-defined role. They transmitted existing knowledge, produced new knowledge and trained specialists who were themselves able to produce new knowledge (Tsaousis, 1996). It constituted the higher education cycle of single, linear and sequential system of education that came to an end at a specific age. Moreover, given the limited number of students and the social status and professional prerogatives enjoyed by their graduates, universities were coveted institutions. And all graduates who could influence decision-making in the field of education tended to protect, extend and perpetuate their privileges.

This situation is now changing. The university has entered an era of mass education and is diversifying, broadening its programmes and targeting groups of

different ages with very different needs. At the same time, it is subject to pressure from parallel institutions in the official education system and informal and non-sequential educational activities. Furthermore, university diplomas (Bac + 4 years) do not lead to a stable and clearly defined profession and are not an effective means of social promotion. Consequently, a persistent question remains: in the new educational landscape, does the university have a special role to play? This paper has confined itself to addressing the educational dimension of Greek universities. Their image is currently far from clear, although this may be due to the transitional period they are undergoing. In any event, the way ahead is neither clear nor obvious nor a foregone conclusion. Yet a new identity seems to be emerging as Greek universities search for a new role.

Notes

1. In any case, the fact that the Greek ministry of Education and Universities persists in maintaining long programmes is surprising at a time when Greece faces a serious problem of dropouts or prolonged studies. At the same time, most EU countries have adopted short programmes (2 years) over the past few years (Jallade, 1991; Stamelos, 1994).
2. Obviously, the purpose of this question is not to raise obstacles to the possibility of upgrading of the status of ITEs. The problem arises when there is an attempt to impose this upgrading through legislation, without prior planning and without an evaluation procedure. This is ultimately a policy decision that affects the university both institutionally and qualitatively as well as the professional rights of its graduates, at a time of an employment crisis. It is revealing that ITE graduates are already applying pressure to obtain the same professional rights as university graduates.
3. For example: "IST Studies" (in co-operation with the University of Hertfordshire), *Eleitherotipia*, 20/9/98; "DEI Arts, Science and Technology" (in co-operation with the University of Lancaster), *Eleitherotipia*, 30/9/98; "Master's in Business Administration (MBA)", *Eleitherotipia*, 13/9/98.
4. For example: "IST Studies" (in co-operation with the Universities of Bulgaria, Ukraine, Serbia and the United Kingdom), *I Imera*, 22/9; "Digital Art School", *Eleitherotipia*, 20/9/98; "IEK Xini", *Eleitherotipia*, 20/9/98.
5. For example: "IST Studies" (in co-operation with the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside), *Kyriakatiki Eleitherotipia*; "Athens Campus" (in co-operation with the University of Wales and Bournemouth University; *Eleitherotipia*, 7/9/98; "MBA", *Eleitherotipia*, 30/9/98.

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