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ABSTRACT

The European Community (EC) is continually increasing its influence in all areas of European society, politically, economically, and now educationally. The future, it is argued, may see the EC as a supra-national policy maker for higher education as significant, as are national governments at the present time. This paper examines the role of the European Community (EC) in policy formation for higher education. Results of formal interviews with EC officials, faculty members, and higher education association representatives are presented, as re examinations of treaties and other formal documents which stipulate the power and authority of the EC. The report is divided into three sections. The first section explains the study's conceptual framework and methods. The second section describes the EC, its programs and activities in the area of higher education. The third section focuses on the question of what is, and what should be, the role of the EC in the processes of policy formation for higher education. The EC is discussed in its roles as starter mechanism (in initiating plans, programs, and activities) as policy influencer and as policy shaper. The EC is expected to be the driving force of a new European structure in higher education. (Contains eight references.) (GLR)

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FORMATION IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Pittsburgh Hilton and Towers, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 4-7, 1993. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

The European Community (EC) began more than forty years ago as a union of six countries for the purpose of harmonizing coal and steel production. Since then there has been phenomenal growth and evolution. Membership has grown to twelve countries and many more are clamoring to join. A huge political, administrative, and legal apparatus has been established in Brussels, the Hague, and Strasbourg. EC economic and regulatory activities touch nearly all businesses and industries, its fiscal policies affect bank, commercial and individual pocketbooks; its political activities affect not only those who post-Maastricht will be citizens of the new Europe but other nations as well; and its recent commitment to broaden its scope to include such social policy areas as health, welfare, education, and the environment suggest a reach into all aspects of daily life for millions of Europeans.

In the area of higher education, the EC has evolved from non-involvement during its early years, to gradually increasing activity throughout the 1980's and early 1990's. By 1993, it is possible to conclude, as will be argued in a companion paper to this, that the EC has a substantial impact on higher education policies, patterns and practices in the member countries. In the future, EC may become a supra-national policy maker for higher education as significant as are national governments at the present time.

This paper will examine the role of the EC in policy formation for higher education. It is drawn from a more broadly focused study of the impact of the European Community on higher education in EC member countries, undertaken with a friend and colleague during a year long sabbatical. The first section concerns conceptual framework and methods and describes how such concepts as higher education system, policy, and policy formation are used. The second section provides brief but essential descriptive information on the EC, and on its programs and activities in the area of higher education. The third section focuses on the questions of what is, and what should be, the role of the EC in the precesses for policy formation for higher education? These questions are far from settled in western Europe but the answers have important long term ramifications for higher education systems.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

Burton Clark (1983) sets forth the basic elements of the higher education system from an organizational perspective. Knowledge, and knowledge bearing groups are the most basic building blocks. Work, belief and authority, defined as the

distribution of legitimate power, are the organizational elements. The dynamic elements include integration and change. Clark describes how these elements are elaborated and combined in distinctive ways into national higher education systems and how national systems can be compared in cross-national perspective. He intentionally uses two different definitions of higher education system--the first "an aggregate of formal entities, e.g. the French system of higher education seen as the sum of many individual universities, colleges, and institutes, together with such apparent formal machinery as the ministry of education." (1983, pp4-5); the second a "broader approach that includes any of the population when engaged in postsecondary educational activities, either as controllers, organizers, workers, or consumers." (1983, p.5). Clark uses both definitions in order to avoid an unnecessarily rigid and not analytically useful demarcation of boundaries between insiders and outsiders (1983, p. 5).

This study is rooted in Burton Clark's conceptual frame. National higher education systems are viewed as loosely bounded collections of relatively independent colleges and universities and other educational organizations that are linked by legislative and fiscal relationships to political systems--in most cases national governments but often also sub-national political entities such as state, county or municipal governments; and even more loosely bounded collections of people who are engaged in postsecondary education in a given country. Each of the twelve countries that are members of the European Community has a higher education system with well established and newer postsecondary institutions; each system has distinctive patterns of work and belief and of authority distribution between governments and educational entities. (These systems are described in the Encyclopedia of Higher Education (Clark and Neave 1992) and in the higher education literature, and will not be described here.)

The European Community (or Union, the currently favored term in Brussels, but not yet widely used) represents a relatively new supra-national economic and political system with considerable power over member countries. It has developed many connections with national higher education systems and with component universities, various higher education associations and groups, and individual researchers. Does it constitute a new higher education system, one bounded by the national higher education systems of the twelve member countries? While it is theoreticly possible, of course, to postulate such a system, is it useful to understanding the dynamics of higher education in Western Europe? These questions will be pursued in this paper.

National higher education systems in western Europe, as elsewhere, have close relationships to their respective governments. They are perceived as public goods, the

beneficiaries of public financing, and subject to public policy making. This study defines policies as authoritative statements or formal agreements such as laws, rooted in some system of values, that serve as guides to action, and which are recognized as legitimate by those affected by them. It draws upon depictions of policy processes and policy analysis in higher education of Premfors (1992) and Kogan and Husen (1984).

In this study, policies are viewed as establishing the basic purposes and parameters of higher education systems. National governments make policies for higher education, so do state and/or local governments in most countries, and so do institutions of higher education themselves. There is considerable variety across countries in patterns of policy formation, that is in determinations about which policies are made at which level of authority from the institutional to the national government. As national governments usually provide most of the financing for higher education systems, however, national policies are increasingly important. Premfors (1992) has noted that, with respect to national policy formation in higher education, there are six sets of policy choices that are of a "constitutive" nature. These concern size, structure, location, admissions, governance and curricula.

The processes for policy formation at various system levels (e.g. national, state, local government, institutional) involve complex negotiations and interactions among those with the authority to make policy and those who will be affected by whatever policies are made. Actors and stakeholders bring varying amounts of power, influence and competence to the process, and thus policies are shaped in a variety of different ways. Policies are further affected by complex processes of implementation in which original goals and objectives are sometimes ignored or subverted and intended actions or resource uses not carried out. This allows for a variety of roles and influences in the processes for policy making.

Methods

This research on patterns of policy formation is part of a larger effort to study the impact of the European community on higher education in the member countries. The impact study is a collaborative, year long sabbatical project involving two researchers and nine months in Europe. (Methods for the impact study are more fully described in the companion paper by Charles Adams.)

When we arrived in June 1992, Charles Adams and I had very little information. We had found a few discussions and some research studies on EC programs and activities in the area of higher education in journals available in our University library. we had seen two brief stories in the Chronicle of Higher

Education, and we had written for a copy of the EC Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community (EC Commission 1991). We did not know if the larger questions of impact or policy formation were being researched by European or other scholars. We weren't even sure whether our formulation of the issues made any sense. Therefore our work can perhaps best be described as exploratory, designed to gather information as we went along.

We traveled through many of the member countries, visiting university towns along the way, touring campuses, looking at bulletin boards for EC notices, reviewing catalogues for descriptions of European studies programs and EC related activities. We spent many days in University libraries--discovering European journals and examining the EC collections. Through this kind of informal observation and travel, we were trying to get a feel for the presence of EC and Europe in the daily lives of universities in EC member countries. We had several dozen informal conversations with people about the EC and higher education.

After several months we decided that our questions made sense and that our study was not duplicating other scholarly work. We began to gather information more systematically. We conducted more than fifty formal, semi-structured interviews. Although we spent nearly a year in Europe, time and resource constraints allowed us to visit only seven of the twelve countries (the Republic of Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom--England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland). Our formal interviews involved EC officials, government officials and staff working in the area of higher education, university administrators and academic leaders, faculty members, and higher education association representatives. During interviews, we asked for opinions about the role of the European Community in policy formation for higher education. We also examined treaties and other formal documents which stipulate the power and authority of the European Community, and we examined EC education-related documents.

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION

The "European Idea" had been advocated for centuries, but it was only after World War II that several specific initiatives were taken. The Organization for European Economic Cooperation (later OECD) was a post WWII grouping of 17 European nations and the United States to help rebuild war-ravaged economies. A Council of Europe as founded in 1948 as a consultative body of 130 members. It mainly discussed human rights and cultural relations but lacked enforcement powers for its resolutions. The first step toward a common market was taken with the establishment in 1953 of the European Coal and Steel Community, a

six member community which enjoyed outstanding success in profitably coordinating huge coal and steel industries.

Building on that success and seeking to expand to other areas of economic integration, the European Economic Community (EEC) was established in 1958, the result of a Treaty of Rome (1957). The purpose of the EEC (later EC) was to bring about harmonious economic development and expansion, foster high levels of employment, raise the standard of living, and stabilize prices. Initial activities centered around promotion of trade and the free movement of goods, capital, services, and persons among member states. The founding countries included France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. They were joined by Denmark, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom in 1973, by Greece in 1981, and by Spain and Portugal in 1986. Many countries are currently seeking membership. Each member country contributes resources and the community then redistributes these resources toward community objectives though a series of specially developed structural funds.

The EC is different from the many voluntary associations of countries in Europe, such as OECD, or UNESCO. It was created as a new supra-national body with power to legislate. The four major structural components of the EC include the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the European Court of Justice. The Commission, a small group whose members are appointed by member governments but expected to be independent of them, initiates proposals for legislation, protocols, directives, or programs consistent with EC goals and objectives. Commission proposals are then discussed by the European Parliament, a more than 400 member body elected by the citizens of member countries, and advice is given to the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers, one minister for each member country named by their respective governments, formally acts on all proposals forwarded by the Commission. The Commission has responsibility for implementing Community policies and programs and for the coordination of activities, although its actions can be challenged in the European Court and it can be censured by the European Parliament. The European Court of Justice adjudicates all disagreements over authority between the EC and member countries, and all substantive disputes over Community policies and directives. A number of standing committees, most notably the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, serve in advisory capacity to the Commission and Council of Ministers.

The Community acts in a variety of ways. In some cases, formal policies are established by the Community itself in the form of formal treaties and protocols. Once approved by the Council of Ministers and, where appropriate, by the member countries according to their constitutional processes, these must

be observed in all member states. In other cases, community agreements lead to legislation and/or harmonization of policies promulgated by the member states. The Community also works through programs designed to further community objectives and supported by community funds. These programs are voluntary for the member states. The Commission is supported by a large bureaucracy in Brussels, organized into Directorates and Task Forces.

Although there was much activity and building of infrastructure throughout the 1960's, by 1970 the Community was far from realizing its ambitious goals, and there was considerable internal discontent. Many feared its supra-national authority and felt it was too strong and powerful, ruled by a technocratic elite with allegiances only to Europe and to no national government. Others, felt that it was moving too slowly, hampered by the necessity for unanimous agreement within the Council of Ministers for all policy initiatives. Throughout the 1970's, Community rhetoric emphasized the general quality of life as well as economic expansion and development. By the 1980's, the theme of effective competitiveness was introduced. EC was positioning itself to be competitive with other economic blocks such as the Pacific Rim or the Americas.

The Single European Act, which entered into force in 1987, brought new momentum to the Community. It added articles to the original Treaty of Rome which emphasized the need for "economic and social cohesion" and for the reduction of economic disparities between the various regions within the community. To achieve these aims, the structural fund mechanisms were reformed and the resource levels vastly increased. The European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund would now be directed toward five priority objectives--promoting the development of less-developed regions, converting regions seriously affected by industrial decline, combatting long term unemployment, providing employment for the young, adjusting agricultural structures and promoting the development of rural areas. The Act also moved from a unanimous to majority rule requirement for the Council of Ministers, making it impossible (except in exception circumstances) for one country to veto a measure desired by the others. This opened the way to much faster agreement on policies and programs.

The years following the Single European Act were characterized by a flurry of activity in the Community directed toward achieving the single european market by 1992. Customs barriers were eliminated, monetary policies were more closely coordinated and regulatory activity increased. In 1989, the Commission proposed a Charter of Fundamental Social Rights covering, among other things, freedom of movement, fair remuneration, improvement of working conditions, and the right to

social security. It has now been approved by all heads of government except the United Kingdom. This brings the Community much more strongly into the realm of social policy.

The Treaty of European Union signed at Maastricht (February 1992) goes further than any previous EC agreement. It adds articles to the Treaty of Rome which dramatically expand the scope of EC responsibility. It establishes cohesion as a guiding principle for all community policies, calls for economic and monetary union with a single currency, establishes a new status of European citizen, provides the first steps toward political union and common foreign policy, and looks ahead to a common defence policy. It also brings new policy areas under the jurisdiction of EC. At the same time, however, it introduces into community law the concept of "subsidiarity" (reminiscent of the 10th amendment to the U.S. constitution), which limits Community action to certain, designated spheres and objectives. The process of ratification of the Maastricht Treaty by the member countries (accomplished differently in each country according to respective constitutional requirements) has been long and boisterous, but as of September 1993 is nearly complete.

The ratification of the Maastricht Treaty touched off widespread debate in Europe about the efficacy of EC, its bureaucratic and technocratic reach, the realistic possibilities and pains associated with eliminating the disparities between rich and poor countries and regions, and the wisdom of a single currency and common monetary policy. While many countries ratified it without fanfare, Denmark rejected it initially and ratified only with many exceptions and special opt outs. It passed by only the narrowest margins in France, and in the United Kingdom it passed only after the Prime Minister threatened to call for new elections if it were not supported. It was an important victory for the EC but an exceedingly narrow one.

Education and the EC

There was little education-related activity in EC during its early years. By the 1970's, however, the EC was supporting a program for the coordinated planning of vocational education among member countries and was involved in a number of activities intended to resolve problems of youth unemployment. It was also supporting significant amounts of university research, the result of an agreement among members of the community that large scale research should be supported at the community level. The Ministers of Education of the member states began to meet regularly during the early 70's, and the Directorate for Research and Science Policy of the Commission became the home for education-related activities.

By 1974, the Ministers of Education had agreed upon a number of areas for community activity: promoting closer relations

between educational systems in Community countries, gathering educational statistics, promoting cooperation in higher education; improving foreign language teaching, promoting free access to education at lower levels. The Ministers were careful, however, to stipulate that EC should not attempt to harmonize educational policies, structures, or curriculum across member countries, because such matters were so important to national identity and culture.

In 1981, because of the strong vocational thrust to community activities, education was moved to the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs. It is now under the leadership of the Director General of Education, Vocational Training and Youth and there is a Task Force on Education, Training and Youth.

By the early 1980's, the Commission had became active in higher or third level education. The COMETT program was initiated in 1986 to stimulate higher education/industry cooperation, promote advanced technology training, and promote training in areas of skills shortages. Now in its second phase, it enables students to work in other EC countries, taking time out from academic work in their home countries. It also supports a number of industry/higher education related projects.

ERASMUS was adopted as an action plan of the European Community in June 1987 in order to promote student mobility and cooperation between higher education institutions within the twelve member states. Participation in ERASMUS was extended to the countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) through a series of agreements which came into force in the 1992/93 academic year. There is also a pilot program currently underway that involves the United States with ERASMUS. ERASMUS

> promotes the formation of partnerships between universities in offering programmes of study so that students have the opportunity of taking a recognized component of their courses in another University in another Member State." (Jones, 1990, p. 9)

Financial support is provided to students in approved programs ICPs) and to staff for purposes of travel and other matters related to program development. ERASMUS has grown dramatically over the past several years, although it has yet to reach its stated goal involving 10% of the third level higher education student body.

LINGUA is another EC action program. Established in 1992 and administratively linked to ERASMUS, it provides special support for language acquisition and teaching in the languages of the community. It provides grants for students in language related ICPs and visit grants for teachers and administrators in higher education. Another recent scheme, TEMPUS, is modelled on

ERASMUS but designed for projects in central and eastern Europe. The most recent effort, the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) is a pilot project designed to help solve some of the many academic recognition and credit transfer problems that have plagued the community.

The EC now spends a significant amount of money on these and other education-related programs. Although each was established for a specified period of years, with a requirement for review and renewal, they have become part of the organizational fabric of the EC. Recently, there has been considerable discussion about the possibilities for shifting some of the responsibility for support of these programs from Brussels to the member countries and to institutions of higher education. This idea has not been welcomed by the higher education community.

The Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community was published by the EC Commission in December 1991. Described more fully elsewhere in this paper, it is the first EC document to address higher education as a whole and to raise a number of policy issues related to higher education.

In June 1993, Thomas O'Dwyer replaced Hywel C. Jones as the Director of the Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training, and Youth and thus became the most important higher education voice in Brussels. By now more than 150 professionals work on matters related to higher education in Brussels about half of them in "policy roles" (Brussels, personal interview).

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND POLICY FORMATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

It is clear that EC has been active in the area of higher education for nearly a decade, and that its activity levels are increasing. But does it and should it have a role in policy making for higher education?

When this research project was first conceived we thought these were relatively straightforward questions. We were thinking in terms of formal, legal authority to make policy, and about positive and negative attitudes toward the EC among those concerned with higher education in national governments and universities. We realize, in retrospect, that we also made an implicit assumption, based on US biases no doubt, that EC wanted a more explicit/ stronger role in policy making for higher education.

We found, to our surprise, many differences of interpretation and opinion about the role itself among the higher education community in Western Europe. A variety of nuances on

the policy making role surfaced during our conversations, nuances that appear to us more important than a simple tabulation of is/should responses. This section will describe a number of different policy related roles that have been identified by those involved in higher education systems in western Europe and provide examples of these roles. It draws from all of the interviews to date in the impact study, but especially from the interviews with those engaged in the scholarly study of higher education, because this group had clearly thought about these issues. Because of the exploratory nature of our study, our understanding of these roles evolved as we proceeded. Verification of them and further elaboration will require additional research.

Policy Maker

A policy making role implies that authority in this area has been granted by the formal treaties and agreements through which the member countries constructed the European Community. It further implies that the Commission in Brussels chooses to exercise that authority, and that member governments and institutions acknowledge it and follow policy directives. In all of these areas we found less support for an EC policy making role than we expected.

The Treaty of Rome noted that the recognition of academic qualifications and degrees across national borders was important to objectives of providing for the fee movement of goods, services, capital and people within the community and that vocational education was important for economic growth in the community. It authorized EC interest and activity in both areas but it did not make any direct mention of education or higher education.

As Brussels became active in higher education during the 1970's, it justified this activity by noting that all higher education was a form of vocational education. The United Kingdom, and occasionally other countries, frequently challenged EC activity in higher education, noting that EC lacked authority for policy making. One case, having to do with tuition and fee policies for a student involved in a mobility program, was eventually decided by the European Court of Justice in favor of the student and the EC. The Court ruled that the EC had not gone beyond its legitimate powers in establishing rules related to programs that were voluntary and further that EC's remit for vocational education did cover higher education activity.

This opened the door for increased EC activity and COMETT, ERASMUS and LINGUA followed closely upon the Court ruling. Brussels was quite careful, however, to distinguish between voluntary, programmatic activity and the policy making role of national governments in higher education. As noted earlier, the

Single European Act of 1987 was extremely important in the evolution of the community but it did not confer any additional authority on the EC in the area of education.

Nearly all of our interviewees, when asked about the EC role in policy formation for higher education responded by mentioning the Treaty of Rome and saying that the EC does not have a remit in education. They did not believe that it does or should replace the authority of national governments or institutions to set policies that guide higher education systems. They were aware that the EC was "in" education under the rubric of vocational education, but did not believe that this conferred a policy making role.

The Maastricht Treaty can be interpreted as potentially changing the policy making role of the EC. It contains several education related provisions. Article 126 states:

> The community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of Education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity. (Title VIII)

It goes on to say that community action should be aimed at developing the "European dimension" in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of community languages, encouraging mobility of students, promoting cooperation between educational establishments, and developing exchanges of information and experience on common issues. It authorizes the Council, following carefully detailed procedures (specified elsewhere in the Treaty) to "adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonization of the laws and regulations of the Member States." (Article 126, Title VIII)

Article 127 uses similar wording to authorize action in the area of vocational training while Article 57 authorizes the Council "to issue directives for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications."

Included also in the Maastricht Treaty is the controversial article on subsidiarity:

> The Community shall act within the limit of the powers conferred upon it by this Treaty and of the objectives assigned to it therein. In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action

> cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community. Any action by the Community shall not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaty. (Article 3b, Title II)

Is the EC role in policy making for higher education strengthened by the Maastricht Treaty? It will depend on how the Treaty is interpreted by Brussels, by national governments and by the European Court. There is no doubt that Maastricht includes education as a legitimate area of EC activity, but it is also clear that EC is not intended to harmonize education across the community, or to make policies that would have the effect of taking away from national governments the ability to set policies for the system. It seems that EC can legitimately set policies that guide and constrain action within national systems, but it cannot set policies for national systems.

When we asked those we interviewed for opinions about what changes, if any, would result from the Maastricht Treaty in the area of educational policy formation, the responses were surprisingly varied. Many said that the language of the education related articles enables EC action in higher education but that it doesn't give it a role in policy formation. Others believe that Maastricht means that EC can set some policies for "quality" education and/or for the recognition of degrees that could constrain national governments and higher education systems. Still others emphasized the principle of subsidiarity and took it to mean a genuine limitation on EC action in the area of education.

Only a few of those who we talked with felt that the EC should have and take a stronger role in policy formation for higher eduction. One person said:

> Many important European initiatives will need some kind of central steer from Brussels. Countries, by themselves, may not attend to some of the important higher education issues without some pressure and/or some central coordination.

Another person said that he believes that EC has beccme proactive in Education policy as part of its larger social policy agenda, and that it will be pushing countries toward ever greater participation rates in the years ahead. Another described EC as gradually working toward a policy-making role in higher education. Another put it this way:

> The EC role in higher education policy making is one of those questions that is of interest to many but never explicitly discussed. The ministers do

not want to put it on the table, because they want to maintain the primacy of the member states in higher education policy making, but there are some policy areas that grow out of the things that the countries need to do together in higher education, in which EC may have a somewhat greater role in the future. But this is not discussed as such.

Contrary to our initial expectations, conversations with higher education staff of the Commission in Brussels did not reveal a group eager to set policy for higher education. We were told that Brussels can help identify relevant policy issues and help respond to some important European issues through programs but that it is not a policy maker that replaces national governments and it will not mandate policies to member countries. We were also told, however, that higher education is an area of social policy of increasing concern to the EC and they "will try to make something happen" in the area.

EC as Starter Mechanism

One person told us that EC used to say they had a policy role in higher education but now they say they have a role as a starting mechanism. There is no question about the fact that EC gets things going in higher education. It initiates action plans, programs, and activities and provides resources to support these programs. The levels of activity and of resources are substantial and growing and the resources flow from Brussels into educational ministries and into institutions of higher education.

From the beginning, higher education has been viewed in instrumentalist terms in Brussels. EC higher education activity is directed toward community purposes and objectives (e.g. research and development for economic development, employment and competitiveness; diffusion of the "european" idea; closer links between higher education and industry for the benefit of industrial development; language skill enhancement in community and member country languages; manpower development). Programs are initiated by Brussels as new community needs and purposes emerge.

These programs and activities have been welcomed by higher education systems and institutions. Their purposes are not seen as inconsistent with more fundamental purposes for higher education and they bring in new and needed resources. Nearly everyone we spoke with was enthusiastic about EC programs and described efforts to take more advantage of them. Although a few worried about long-term negative impacts on higher education, most were more concerned that EC might reduce its levels of resource support for research projects and mobility programs.

Most people we spoke with complained about the narrow vision of higher education espoused in Brussels, with its insistence on linking higher education only to manpower and economic development. They were particularly negative about the Memorandum on Higher Education for its failure to identify the appropriate higher eduction policy issues. These individuals wanted EC to appreciate and understand the larger purposes of higher education in society. At the same time, however, they did not support a policy making role for the EC in higher education but were comfortable with a "starter" role. Only one person remarked that higher education will be so essential to the new social Europe that is being created that the EC will have to go beyond instrumentalist approaches to education.

EC officials involved in higher education describe their role carefully. In a published speech, Hywel C. Jones until June 1993 the Director of the Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, emphasized the "catalytic role" of the EC in higher education (Jones, 1990). According to Jones, EC is "helping build the infrastructure for continued connected activity" and using a "bottom up" approach. He points out common elements in the design of all the EC programs that relate to higher education--networking, mobility and exchange, the transfer of innovative approaches and best practices, and a European dimension which changes the nature of the orientation and allows for a broader intellectual focus.

Many examples of the EC starting mechanism were suggested during our interviews. Although student and faculty exchanges were not a new phenomenon in Europe, the scale of ERASMUS, LINGUA and now TEMPUS activities is far greater than anything that existed before. EC initiatives in the area of quality assessment, brought to the table during the Netherlands presidency, have sparked considerable interest throughout Europe and quality assessment has now become the subject of much national policy making. One person believes that "a European approach to quality assessment" will emerge and serve as a model for many other countries. Some recent EC initiatives in the area of accreditation have become popular among the rectors of European universities.

EC as Policy Influencer

For many years now, EC has been starting things. Its programs and activities have been slowly seeping into the fabric of the daily lives of staff and students in colleges and universities throughout the community. Tracing the full impact of this process is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note that having an impact on governmental and institutional higher education policies, is an important aspect of the EC role in higher education policy formation.

Although EC programs are voluntary, they provide strong incentives in the form of resources and opportunities for students, staff, and institutions. Few resist them. Participation in them, however, leads governments and institutions to change their own policies for higher education.

We were given many examples of this form of influence during the interviews. The availability of large scale resources for research and development projects in the EC has led many countries to cut back on their support for university research and to expect researchers and institutions to find other sources of support for the research function. Institutions throughout the community have created European desks or other offices to help researchers get money. One person noted that you have to ask the question of what this means for the traditional autonomy of scholars to shape research policy privately.

Mobility program rules require that students from throughout the community be treated as "home" students for purposes of tuition and fees. This influences tuition and fee policies not only for these students, but for others as well. Many institutions have attempted to make up shortfalls in revenue by charging higher fees to students from outside the community. In order to comply with the rules for mobility programs, faculties have often adjusted their own requirements for course duration, subject matter content, and assessment procedures, thus affecting curricular policy in important ways.

Modular components in academic programs are currently being discussed in many countries. While these developments are not attributable to EC influence alone, there is no question that modularization makes it easier to build collaborative programs across universities and across national borders. A move to modular structures would constitute a fundamental curricular policy shift in western Europe.

EC as Policy Shaper

A related, more subtle, but perhaps in the long run more important form of policy influence has to do with shaping policies at national and institutional levels. It has to do with helping determine the set of policy issues that receive attention, and action, at other levels of policy making; with providing opportunities for discussion and debate of policy issues that bring together broader sets of people than typically present in national policy systems, and with helping determine the ways in which issues are articulated and potential solutions defined.

Our understanding of this role emerged from our interviews as we listened to the ways people answered our questions about EC

and higher education policy formation. Several people told us that the EC has encouraged discussion and debate of important policy issues. Another said:

> It is more appropriate to think of EC as a policy shaper, rather than a policy maker. Policy maker implies instruments and a means to translate an idea into form; policy shaper implies ideas and principles that are passed down to others to develop the instruments to implement.

There are many examples of the way EC has shaped policy. The ministers of education meet regularly in Brussels. They discuss EC involvements and activities but they also discuss policy problems and issues that are perceived to be common across the community. They return home with different perceptions of policy problems and different ways of approaching them. Their perceptions gradually seep into national policy systems. One interviewee told us that in Ireland solutions to Irish higher education problems were found round the table in Brussels, not in Dublin.

The EC has sponsored a number of European conferences on higher education that brought scholars and practitioners together and inspired a great many more. They have occasionally sponsored research studies that go beyond evaluations of EC programs, such as the comparative study of public expenditure on higher education undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente (Kaiser, Koelman, Florax and van Vught, 1992). Many with whom we talked noted that there is little coherence in these activities, however, and emphasized that Brussels has failed to develop an adequate information and data base for policy analysis. We were impressed, however, by the focus on higher education and by the attention to higher education as a field of study in Europe.

The Memorandum on Higher Education can be viewed as a policy shaping document. While it talks about higher eduction in instrumentalist terms, that is in terms of EC goals and objectives, it also identifies a set of higher education policy issues (e.g.access, partnership with economic life, continuing education, open and distance education, the curriculum. It argues for a stronger European dimension in all of these areas. What is especially interesting about the document is the fact that it treats higher education as a subject of interest in itself.

It is also worth noting that the Memorandum was treated as a serious policy document by the EC. Preliminary drafts were circulated among the higher education community for comment and were the subject of specially organized conferences in Leuven and Siena. The Memorandum was distributed to each member country and funds were provided so that each country could disseminate it and

prepare an organized response. In most countries, conferences brought together college and university representatives and ministry officials to discuss it. Formal reactions were prepared and forwarded to Brussels. Various trans-national associations (e.g.university rectors) also prepared reactions. Brussels has now put all the reactions together and is deciding what to do. Many predict that not much will come of all this, that Brussels started a discussion but is not prepared to follow with an action plan for higher education, especially in light of the events surrounding the Maastricht Treaty over the past year. Regardless of what happens, however, the Memorandum prompted a European debate on higher education policy.

There is another, rather subtle, policy shaping dynamic at work. One person called it the "cache" of Brussels. Researchers win in the competition for individual acclaim by bringing in research contracts from Brussels. Faculties and academic departments with Brussels supported programs are viewed as more exciting and "cutting edge". They gain status within their own institutions. Colleges and universities seek international activity lest they be left behind in the institutional competition for prestige. In such a climate there is much more openness to policy change from within institutions. It is important to note that EC is only one among many forces leading individuals and institutions toward greater international activity, but EC is an important force and EC connections and support are valued by the higher education community.

EC as System for Higher Eduction

This paper began with the question of whether it was useful to posit a new supra-national higher education system bounded by the EC member countries. It examined the role of the European Community in policy formation for higher education in member countries. The examination revealed some ambiguities. The documents, higher education officials in Brussels, and most government and university officials made it clear that policy making for higher education is the responsibility of each member country and that the EC has only a limited, and still controversial, direct role in policy formation. It is also true, however, that there are several policy related roles played by the EC and its Commission in Brussels. These promise to have less direct, but no less important, consequences for higher education in western Europe. For this reason, it is useful to think of the EC as a possible supra-national higher education system.

There is some evidence that a policy arena is forming in Brussels. One scholar we interviewed noted that universities are beginning to form "proto-cartels" around EC programs, and gave as an example the regular meetings of universities of large, not

capitol cities, of western Europe. Many higher education associations, and many universities, now maintain "representatives" in Brussels, and government officials regularly refer to their "education person" in the EC. Such interest group formation in Brussels forms the nexus of a policy arena.

One higher education scholar with long experience in Europe told us:

> EC can be viewed as a kind of driving force of a new European structure in Higher Education. A centralized perspective on matters of higher education. Granted they say they don't want to harmonize and that they want to maintain diversity, but in a sense they lead the nations to harmonize themselves from what they learn from each other...So despite stated objectives in treaties and statements, EC is effecting a change in the way higher education is seen and enacted in Europe. (emphasis added)

The European Community has had an important influence on higher eduction in Western Europe not only through its programs. activities and resource allocations but through its roles as starter, influencer and shaper of policy. We believe that conceptualizing the EC as a "supra-national" higher education system will allow for the continued focus on policy and policy formation, and that a focus on policy will be especially important in the years ahead.

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