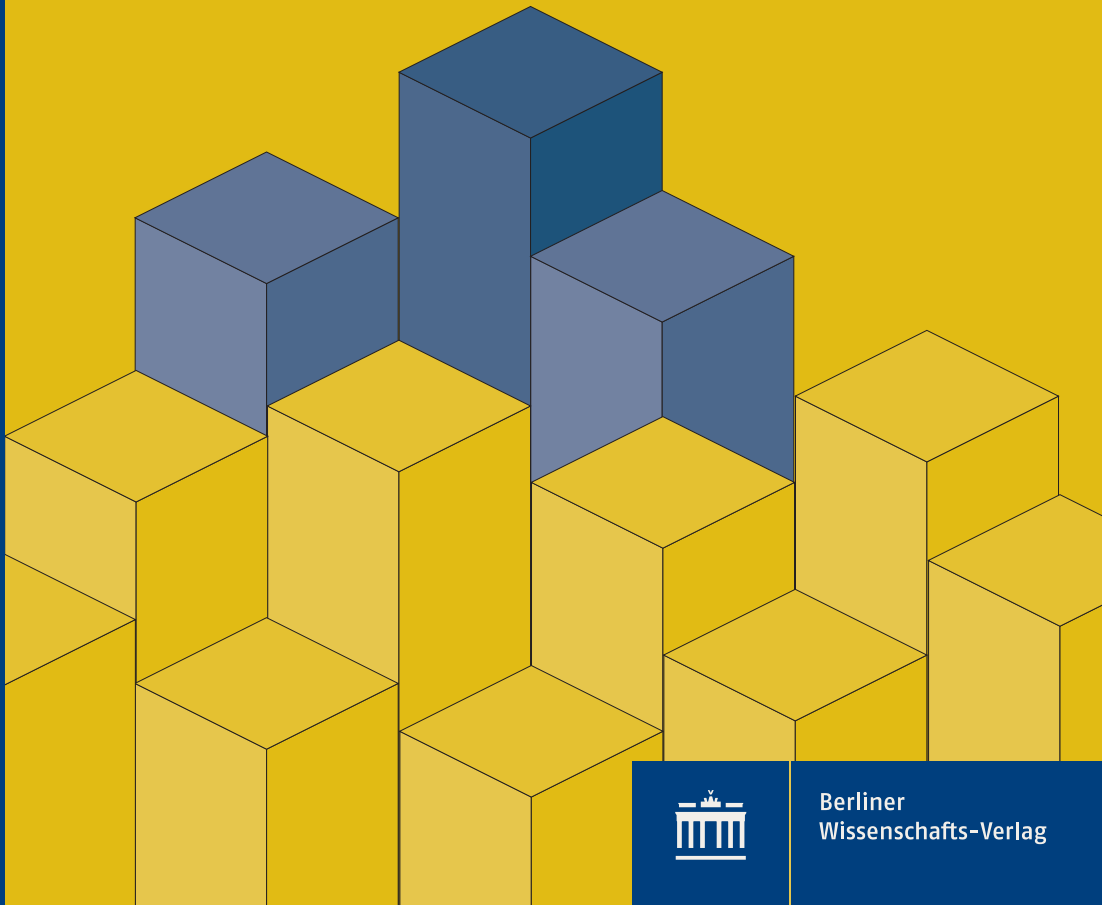


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# The Alternative – Non-state Higher Education in Europe



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## Preface

Non-state or independent universities seem to be at first sight a rather young phenomenon in Europe, compared to the USA, where they have always played an outstanding and highly esteemed role. But if we look deeper into European history, we will find that today world-renowned universities such as Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, or Leipzig also have emerged from non-state roots. They were founded in the Middle Ages either as church or monastic schools or as independent institutions of scholars. In the course of history, they gradually became state universities. Non-state universities therefore are not an invention of our time, but part of the European intellectual and cultural history, as Walter Rüegg, among others, pointed out in his monumental “History of the University in Europe”. The oldest, still existing, non-state university in Germany, the Technical University Georg Agricola in Bochum, founded in 1816, can look back on more than 200 years of history.

Non-state higher education has undergone an exciting renaissance in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of totalitarian Marxist tyranny in the east of our continent, in which governments sought to control society in every respect and, above all, the education of young people. This renaissance also reflects a change in views on the legitimate role of central administration in academic matters, as Guy Neave has put it in Part 1 of the above quoted “History of the University in Europe”. As a result, we now can see in almost all EU States a strong growth of non-state universities.

The structural and quantitative development of non-state higher education within the European Union is still rather heterogeneous, characterized by different educational traditions and policies of the member-states. However, with the progressing harmonization of national higher education systems with common rules and standards, these traditions will become less and scientific impact and quality of teaching more important. “Bologna Process”, “European Higher Education Area” (EHEA) and “European Research Area” (ERA) are the key words for this development towards a modern and globally competitive European knowledge industry. This process will also open up new opportunities for non-state universities and they are keen to use them.

This study is an attempt to provide a comparison of the academic mission and the political, legal, and economic conditions for non-state universities in the European Union. The main emphasis is put on the countries in which the European Union of Private Higher Education (EUPHE) is present. They are hereinafter referred to as “EUPHE-Countries”.

## Preface

The study would not have been feasible without the knowledge and experience of insiders of non-state higher education in these countries. The EUPHE-Countries represent different regions in Europe and different cultures and traditions in higher education, but they have in common that their non-state education sector is already well developed. The study is complemented by a short glance on non-state higher education in the other EU-Countries. This is the first study on higher education, dealing only with non-state higher education institutions in Europe and therefore it may still be incomplete and not fully systematic.

There are some reasons for that, including insufficient public statistics on non-state universities, and different statistical systems, classifications, and terminologies in the EU-Countries. Nevertheless, considering these challenges, this comparative study initiates a better understanding of the non-state higher education sector in Europe, following the Chinese proverb: “Every great journey begins with a first step”. The growing knowledge about non-state higher education in Europe will continuously improve the quality of further comparisons.

This study is also an appreciation of the entrepreneurial commitment of civil society and its contribution to higher education of future generations through the establishment and operation of non-state universities.

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# The European Hall of Fame of Non-State Higher Education

## **The oldest non-state university in Europe still in operation**

Georg Agricola University of Technology in Germany, since 1816

## **The largest non-state university**

University of Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Italy with 40,000 students

## **The largest non-state university of applied sciences**

FOM University in Germany with 55,000 students

## **The country with the most non-state universities**

Poland with 257

## **The country with the highest proportion of non-state universities**

Slovenia with 93 %

## **The country with the most non-state online-universities**

Italy with 11 out of 12

## **The country with the highest number of non-state universities in international rankings (THE Ranking, QSWorld University Ranking, Scimago University Ranking (2020/21))**

Spain with 17 citations

## **The country with the most students in non-state universities**

France with 389.000

## **The country with the highest proportion of students in non-state universities**

Poland with 27.7 %

## **The country with the highest proportion of female students in non-state universities**

Austria with 61 %

## **The country with the highest proportion of international students in non-state universities**

Ireland with 19 %

## **The country with the highest number of employees in non-state universities**

Spain with 30,020

## **The country with the highest proportion of employment in non-state universities**

Slovenia with 22.9 %

## **The European Hall of Fame of Non-State Higher Education**

### **The country with the highest proportion of female employees in non-state universities**

Germany with 55.8 %

### **The country with the highest budget of non-state universities**

France with 2.77 billion Euros

### **The country with the highest share of the budget in the higher education sector**

Portugal with 35 %

## Aims of the study

Non-state higher education in Europe is still a “terra incognita” from a scientific point of view. The reasons for this are:

- that state-universities have traditionally the opinion leadership on all matters of higher education and that research on education is mainly concerned with the state higher education system,
- that in national education policies of most EU-Countries higher education is primarily understood as a matter of state-universities,
- that statistics on non-state universities, and thus the level of knowledge of their performance for the common good, are not very well developed.
- and finally, that the lobby of non-state universities has not yet been very effectively organized on the European level.

Non-state higher education, despite its growing importance in recent times, is often still seen by politics, media and the broad public as a niche, a complement and sometimes unwanted competitor of state higher education rather than as an independent system on its own right. At the same time, it is still denounced for commercializing education and thus jeopardizing the goal of educational equity. If we take a closer look at reality, it becomes evident that these assumptions are not correct (see chapter Non-state Higher education – Pro and Cons). Indeed, they contribute with their entrepreneurial dynamics and in a vivid competition to the mobility of ideas, faculty and students in Europe and to educational diversity and permeability of the educational system. This shows among other in:

- an ever-increasing number of non-state universities supported by industry, non-for-profit associations and foundations,
- an ever-increasing range of programs which today cover all major scientific fields, whose equivalence with the courses of state-universities is ensured by mandatory quality assurance procedures and state approval,
- a steadily growing number of students and a growing market share of non-state higher education,
- a growing cooperation between non-state universities and economy, when it comes to the training of skilled workers,
- and a growing number of jobs in non-state higher education.



## Aims of the study

Despite this contribution to educational diversity and efficiency, most EU-Countries, are just tolerating, but not promoting non-state higher education. The reason for this could be seen in the prevailing traditional view of European governments that higher education is primarily a public task to be carried out by state-universities. In this mind-set, non-state universities are perceived less as an enrichment, but rather as undesirable competitors.

Despite the intention to create a single European Higher Education Area (EHEA), non-state universities in the EU are still subject to very different legal framework conditions. This reaches from constitutional prohibition of domestic non-state universities in Greece to their financial support by the government in Slovenia or France, from the admission to designate non-state higher education institutions as “universities” in Germany and Austria to the prohibition of this designation for non-states in France, from the legal claim of non-state universities on state-approval of courses in the EUPHE-Countries to the right of the Swedish Government to make admission of non-state higher courses dependent on whether this is in national interest.

Higher education in Europe is ranging between the poles of central planned “state-education system” to an “education-market system”. Depending on how the individual EU-Countries position themselves between these poles, they shape the framework conditions for the establishment and operation of non-state universities. The “European Independent Higher Education Score” in this study tries for the first time to rate the EU-Countries according to how favorable conditions there are for non-state universities.

If we look at the different treatment of non-state higher education in the EU-Countries, it is apparent that there can be seen still discriminatory and distortive effects which hinder a fair competition between state and non-state universities, which should be one of the characteristics of an efficient single EHEA.

If Europe wants to maintain and extend its position in the global knowledge industry in competition with Asia and America, it should attract and educate the best and brightest talents. Higher education institutions can serve this objective best, if they are treated equally, regardless of whether they are state or non-state and measured only by their contribution to better education, research and the common good. Precondition for such a performance- and outcome-oriented higher education system is more transparency in terms of performance, results and framework-conditions under which state, as well as non-state universities operate in the EHEA. The various independent rankings and digital university portals contribute better and better to this transparency, although the non-state universities are still underrepresented there.

This study is meant to contribute to this transparency, comparing the situation of non-state higher education in the European Union. The main emphasis is on the nine EU-

Countries in which EUPHE currently is present. It is based on available data from public statistics, government reports, scientific studies and information from the non-state universities themselves.

Currently, national and European statistics on non-state higher education are still too heterogeneous to ensure full comparability throughout Europe. This will change in the years to come. The European Commission contributes to this with two digital platforms, which are open to all universities, whether they are state or non-state:

- the European Register of Tertiary Education (ETER)<sup>1</sup>
- the UMultirank Framework<sup>2</sup>

These portals, if used consistently by non-state universities, can help to draw a somewhat more balanced picture of the European higher education system, in which the performance of non-state universities can also be better highlighted.

1 [www.eter-project.com](http://www.eter-project.com)

2 [www.umultirank.org](http://www.umultirank.org)