



Internationalization of Higher Education: Lithuanian Experience in Bologna Process and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to investigate the influence of international documents on the process of internationalization of higher education and to identify political, legal, organizational, financial pre-requisites for internationalization of higher education in Lithuania. Method of comparative critical analysis of references was employed for the study. Therefore, this paper aims at investigating the influence of international documents, related to internationalization of higher education and at identifying political, legal, organizational, financial prerequisites for internationalization of higher education in Lithuania. The study showed that the scope and content of internationalization may be conceptualized as having several tiers: macro, mezzo and micro. Macro tier assigns higher education with the role to contribute to positive developments in society and economies, to democracy and cohesion. Mezzo tier assigns higher education with a task to provide students with high level educational services in order to help graduates to acquire necessary competencies. Micro tier assigns higher education institutions with task to organize their activities in order to secure achievement of tasks at mezzo and macro tiers. In Lithuania both idea and purpose of internationalization gained support by general public, national authorities and authorities of individual higher education institutions. The numbers of students incoming and outgoing of Lithuania in the framework of Erasmus program is increasing but the negative difference between the outgoing and incoming Erasmus students could be addressed by the Lithuanian authorities. Its negative influence is outweighed by the steadily increasing number of foreign students coming to study to Lithuania without any supporting exchange programs.

INTRODUCTION

During the last century world became globalized: almost all areas of social life are affected by globalization. “It is probably impossible to nowadays find a policy statement on higher education that does not start with a sentence close to “in a globalized world... education plays a critical role <...>” (King et. al., 2011). Internationalization of higher education is often considered a potentially powerful factor in coping with tasks that come together with globalization, and, therefore, higher education has become noticeably internationalized during the past decade (Delgado-Marquez et al., 2013). Various authors recognize necessity for internationalization in higher education (Dewey and Duff, 2009; Altbach and Knight, 2007; de Vit, 2002; Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2004; Qiang, 2003), providing imperative arguments that isolated environment can no longer serve the main tasks and expectations set for an educating institution in a contemporary society (Bartell, 2003). Our global times ask for globally competent citizens. Global competency, understood as “having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one’s environment, requires internationalized higher education” (Dewey and Duff, 2009). Universities consider that international experiences, including study abroad can assist students in preparing themselves for global society (Horie, 2002). It is already acknowledged that internationalization of higher education became a central theme in Europe during the last decade of 20th century (Teichler, 2004); moreover, a hypothesis is provided that internationalization will become a crucial factor in developing higher education systems, even if functions of internationalization remain to be clarified: some experts state that up to 15 million students will study abroad by 2025 (in comparison to 2 million during the first decade of 21st century) (Altbach and Knight, 2007).

In this context and in the light of these challenges, the issue of internationalization will probably remain at the focus of analysis at least in near future, because internationalization of higher education is often regarded as a potential asset in globalization; in addition, studies provide evidences that internationalization positively influences a university’s reputation (Delgado-Marquez et al., 2013).

However, it will be intellectually irresponsible to conceptualize internationalization as a social phenomenon that takes place on its own, as if it is a natural phenomenon. On the contrary, internationalization is highly influenced by policies and legal frameworks. „European Internationalism”, or “Europeanisation” is worth special attention (Dakowska, 2014), because European Union actively pursued academic internationalization as a measure towards economic and political integration for at least twenty years (Altbach and Knight, 2007).

Therefore it is worth analyzing the degree and vector of changes, triggered by the framework of the international, especially, European Union’s strategic documents, also, ideas of internationalization on higher education system in a small state that has endured in-depth transformations just recently.

These transformations in concepts of internationalization of higher education are also illustrated by the emergence of the transnational education industry which continues to grow, particularly in UK, USA and Australia, where transnational education forms an increasingly important part of universities’ internationalization strategies (Bakar and Talib, 2013). Such industry is greatly influenced by the policies and legal acts and regulations adopted by the states and international organizations.

The aim of the article is to investigate the influence of international documents on the process of internationalization of higher education and to identify political, legal, organizational, financial pre-requisites for internationalization of higher education in Lithuania.

Objectives are as follows:

- Identify scope and contents of term of internationalization.

- Analyze international and national documents aimed at facilitating internationalization of higher education.
 - Discuss indicators of internationalization of Lithuanian higher education.
- Method of comparative critical analysis of references was employed for the study.

1. IDEA, PURPOSE AND CONTENTS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Internationalization is a term with rather diverse contents and history. It should be noted that even a superficial analysis will reveal internationalization of higher education being a phenomenon that counts hundreds and, possibly more than a thousand years. Old universities were examples of extreme – and successful - internationalization (in Bologna, Paris, in Oxford, in Torun, in Krakow) (Zuzeviciute, 2011). However, contemporary internationalization is expected to be instrumental for different purposes than earlier. Rather than having an elitist orientation, it is orientated towards equality; rather than serving as an instrument for colonization, today it serves social cohesion.

Today globalization resulted in an impressive increase in academic mobility across national borders (Cantwell and Taylor, 2013). With increasing globalization and mobility, multicultural societies are created, where people with different backgrounds, cultures and languages cooperate (Bagić and Vrhovac, 2012). Many universities have participated in international activities for decades (for example, prestigious U.S. colleges use international programs to provide international and cross-cultural perspectives for their students and to enhance their curricula) (Siaya and Hayward, 2003).

Globalization, based on intensive capital and information exchange, physical mobility of high numbers of people, has changed contents and purposes of internationalization, and its perception: we perceive globalization more intensively as we did earlier. Some authors note the role of globalization and of the knowledge society for in-depth re-organization in higher education systems, because these systems have to adapt their functions in order to meet complex demands and expectations (Mok and Welch 2003). Other authors also note the role of supra-national institutions (e.g., OECD) in the process (Vaira, 2004; Horta, 2009).

Some authors view internationalization as a process of integrating an international focus in curriculum (Groennings and Wiley, 1990). Other authors incorporate also other aspects, emphasizing that the process has an impact on all areas of research, teaching, and service (Knight, 1997). Internationalization is widely discussed, with three vectors of analysis dominating. Firstly, internationalization is a process and not an event; secondly, the purpose of internationalization is to introduce to students and teachers ideas, methods and people from other countries; thirdly, internationalization generates benefits for a university as an entity. Moira Murphy proposed to use the term internationalization of higher education as follows: “The dynamic process of exposing students and faculty to the ideas, methods, and people of other countries because such an experience is beneficial and essential” (Murphy, 2007).

In-depth analysis provides more arguments about benefits of internationalization: internationalization is expected to contribute to cultural integration and harmony, social cohesion, equality, improve the quality of education and research, and improve country and institutional international reputation (Urbanovič and Wilkins, 2013). However, as is almost universal in social sphere, internationalization also has other, less appealing aspects. For example, certain global hierarchies in higher education are evident (Marginson, 2006).

Here it is important to note that internationalization has numerous forms. Internationalization may manifest itself in small scale: a co-taught course; international dimension in contents of curriculum; a scale may be larger: joint programs and double degrees, collaborative research projects, mobility of teachers and students; also a scale may be quite large: establishment of

branch campuses, and international technical assistance and cooperation (Kauppinnen, 2012). In this light it is evident that the most obvious and visible form of internationalization - international student mobility - should not be equated to internationalization per se (Tan and Goh, 2014) just because it is the most visible manifestation of internationalization (Bhandari and Blumenthal, 2011). Academic mobility facilitates quality of collaborative research and geopolitical and economic relations (Forest and Altbach, 2007).

In the policy level of higher education, authors have distinguished four different policy approaches to the internationalization of higher education institutions. The mutual understanding approach stresses the political, cultural, academic and development aid goals for the internationalization process. Therefore the means mostly employed are mobility of domestic and foreign students through the provision of scholarships and academic exchange programs. (Bakar and Talib, 2013). The skilled migration approach adds to those goals the emphasis on the recruitment of the selected international students to the work market of the particular state. (Bakar and Talib, 2013). The exchange programs are supplemented by active advertising of the state's education system in other countries. The revenue-generating approach stresses the possibility to generate additional income for the institution and indirectly for the state; the government's aim to ensure the quality of the education provided. (Bakar and Talib, 2013). Lastly, the capacity-building approach encourages cross-border higher education as a comparably quick method to build the capacities of an emerging country.

Due to those high expectations that are assigned to internationalization, it becomes increasingly complex, and confusing (Knight, 2004). As Simon Marginson suggests: "... higher education as a single world-wide arrangement: not as a unitary 'global system' but as a more complex combination of (1) global flows and networks of words and ideas, knowledge, finance, and inter-institution dealings; with (2) national higher education systems shaped by history, law, policy and funding; and (3) individual institutions operating at the same time locally, nationally and globally" (Marginson, 2006). It is evident that contemporary paradigm of higher education is contrary to isolated activities that characterized Lithuanian higher education as recent as twenty years ago. Changes in society, regaining independence from Soviet Union, were factors that triggered changes in Lithuanian higher education, with internationalization being an important instrument.

2. RESEARCH OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEGAL DOCUMENTS ON FACILITATING INTERNATIONALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

International documents emphasize that higher education should address internationalization, because 1) knowledge becomes increasingly international; 2) internationalized higher education would have wider access to educational resources; 3) mobility for students, researchers, and teachers becomes more intensive. Therefore, because of the diversity of the laws, regulations, practices and traditions that delineate organization and functions of higher education, also, the diversity of constitutional, legal and regulatory requirements and arrangements regulating professions, it is crucial to establish reliable practices that enable after completion of studies to acquire competencies and qualifications with a global profile.

These ideas, however, were cherished for several decades already. The idea of the European Higher Education Area was first introduced in 1953, when the Council of Europe along with UNESCO developed documents on academic recognition in Europe (European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities). Later, the European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study was adopted. In 1959, the European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications was introduced. Subsequently, the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the European Region (1979), and the European Convention on the General

Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1990) were adopted. Internationalization of curriculum in higher education institutions had an impetus on reforms of higher education in many countries since the end of the last century (Huang, 2006).

Underlying notion for all those documents is the idea that the right to education is a fundamental human right and that higher education, which is essential for the advancement of knowledge, and which harbors a rich cultural and scientific source for both an individual and society, should be both supported and relied upon. Higher education should play a crucial role in fostering peace, mutual understanding and tolerance, and in creating competencies for cooperation and respectful discussion for peoples and nations, therefore experiencing higher education in other countries is another rich asset for students, and societies.

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (1997) emphasized that diversity is an exceptional asset, which should be fully respected. Therefore it is necessary to enable all people of the region to benefit fully from this rich asset by facilitating students' access to educational institutions and to educational resources in another state. The need for the recognition of qualifications was especially emphasized.

Lithuanian objective for integrating into the European Higher Education Area was one of the strategic objectives since the process started more than a decade ago. On 19th June, 1999, ministers of 29 countries (including the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania), signed the Bologna Declaration (Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education, 1999). Process of profound changes started, which addressed also philosophy of higher education and its purpose (Kahraman and Sakarya, 2014).

The Declaration formulated objectives, which are considered instrumental for the establishment of the European Area of Higher Education and, moreover, instrumental for promotion of the idea and practices for the European Union. "The Lisbon and Bologna Processes aim to establish the most powerful information society possible, and a lifelong learning system for the satisfaction of the required human resources potential" (Kahraman and Sakarya, 2014). The following objectives, important for the global promotion of the European system of higher education, were identified:

- adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote employability of citizens of the European Union and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system;
- establishment of a system of credits, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility (almost 75% of institutions report using ECTS as a transfer system and over 66% as an accumulation (Crosier et al., 2007);
- promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to students and teachers.

The Bologna Declaration also emphasized the need for coherency and well concerted efforts for promotion of quality in higher education, and also for curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research. It was noted that declaration, though it was not legally-binding, initiated reforms in all countries, which signed it (Heinze and Knill, 2008). Policies that deliberately counteracted relative isolation of national systems of higher education resulted in increased internationalization, impact of activity of different supra-national actors was also important.

Several most influential activities of that kind within four stages of development can be identified (Teichler, 2011). During the first stage, the main efforts of Bologna participants were related to increasing mutual understanding between European countries. Student mobility was encouraged with the hope that experiencing other countries would erase prejudices and increase

understanding for other ways of thinking. The Council of Europe supported individual countries to sign or ratify conventions on recognition of studies since the early 1950s. At first just few aspects of recognition were emphasized (recognition of prior education as entry qualification to higher education). Second stage: subsequently Eastern European countries also introduced similar practices, especially, as they were encouraged by the UNESCO. Eventually these initiatives resulted in Lisbon Convention on recognition of studies (Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European Region, 1997). The third stage was characterized by intensive cooperation and increasing mobility, which was especially supported by the European Union since 1990s (Altbach and Knight, 2007). The Erasmus exemplifies the most prominent and successful initiative (Wächter, 2008). During the fourth stage European countries joined efforts in order to pursue similar higher education policies and to strive for a harmonization of systems. Bologna Declaration encouraged the establishment of similar cycle structure for study programs and for degrees.

Objectives, formulated in the Bologna Declaration generated a huge impact for the momentum of changes: an array of measures was put forward by introduction of subsequent documents. Objectives were ambitious and aimed at increasing common characteristics of national higher education systems (Teichler, 2014).

In 2012 year the Mobility Strategy (Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area, 2012) identified international cooperation as another key measure for quality: „Mobility is essential to ensure high quality higher education and it is also an important pillar for exchange and collaboration with other parts of the world.” Strategy noted the importance for all member countries to develop and implement their own internationalization and mobility strategies or policies; the need for specific aims and measurable mobility targets was emphasized.

Encouraging mobility and joining the European Higher Education Area are legalized in a number of international documents that the Republic of Lithuania ratified or adopted nationally. For example, on 7th April, 1997, a UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees Concerning Higher Education to the Europe Region was ratified. This Convention enumerates main principles providing foundations for recognition of qualifications, for recognition of studies or elements of studies; Convention also identifies what information is necessary for such decisions. On 14th October, 1998, Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania adopted a Law on Ratifying Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in European Region Council of Europe and UNESCO. The Law endorses Government to entitle an institution to perform functions recognizing qualifications nationally and - consequently - to join ENIC: European Network of Information Centers in the European Region.

International commitments provided an impetus for Lithuanian Government to formulate more specific goals for mobility; therefore Government endorsed a Program on Mobility in Higher Education (Decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on approving the development program of the system of science and education 2008-2010). With internationalization being at focus of this study, it is important to note an array of enumerated measures: international dimension should be grounded on bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation for studies and research, on academic mobility of students and teachers, on implementation of research projects. Consequently, the need for joint efforts of several ministries and institutions was emphasized.

Academic mobility is promoted by political will, national initiatives, initiatives of institutions of higher education, and also by economies, by demands and expectations of employers, the increasing global labor market demand for higher education, because mobility is acknowledged as one of the important measures in developing quality of higher education and in disseminating academic and social experiences.

During the last decades several measures were put forward in order to strengthen international dimension in European higher education. In 1997 the European Council on Higher education endorsed the ERASMUS program. Academic mobility was identified as a measure to

increase quality and enhance academic experiences: “The Erasmus framework facilitates student mobility in at least three ways. Firstly, it encourages inter-university cooperation. Secondly, it institutionalizes a set of procedures to maximize the transferability of credits completed while abroad back to the home university. Thirdly, it provides funding for small student grants, disbursed through national agencies, to defray the additional costs associated with studying abroad (e.g. travel expenses, language classes, student housing)” (Mitchell, 2012). Though financial factors were identified among the restricting factors (Vossensteyn et al., 2010) and further focused attention to cooperation between higher education institutions and between higher education institutions and enterprises throughout Europe is still needed (Botas and Huisman, 2013), nevertheless, the quality and diversity of the activities offered in Erasmus program increased (European Commission, 2005).

The concept of learning that is mobile comprises three dimensions: mobility of the technology, learner mobility, and mobility of the learning process and the flow of information (Bryła, 2015). The international mobility programs such as Erasmus “allows to obtain a much wider and more intensive educational and social experience, which will have strong implications for the subsequent professional career.” (Bryła, 2015). Such programs as the study abroad exchange programs are usually the first step in the internationalization process, as they are relatively easy to administer and provide advantages and benefits for the home campus as well as the student, either inbound or outbound. (Begalla, 2013).

Program resulted in increasing numbers: over three million European students had an opportunity to benefit from studies at higher education institution in other countries; program provided significant gains for Lithuanian higher education. Dynamics of incoming and outgoing students changed over the years positively, as is illustrated later in text. The fact implies that this Program proved to be one of the most successful tools of the Bologna Process. Due to this Program, the impact of the Bologna Process manifests itself in qualitatively new indicators of internationalization, because cooperation between institutions enabled implementation of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), comparability of systems and qualifications and a more reputable profile of the European higher education (Decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on approving the program for 2008-2010 years on the Internationalization of Higher Education).

3. INDICATORS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF LITHUANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The analysis above seems to indicate that internationalization has several tiers: macro, mezzo and micro. Macro tier assigns higher education with the role to contribute to positive developments in society and economies, to contribute to democracy and social cohesion. Mezzo tier assigns higher education with a task to provide students with high level educational services in order to assist graduates to acquire competencies necessary globally. Micro tier assigns higher education institutions with task to organize their activities in order to secure achievement of tasks at mezzo and macro tiers.

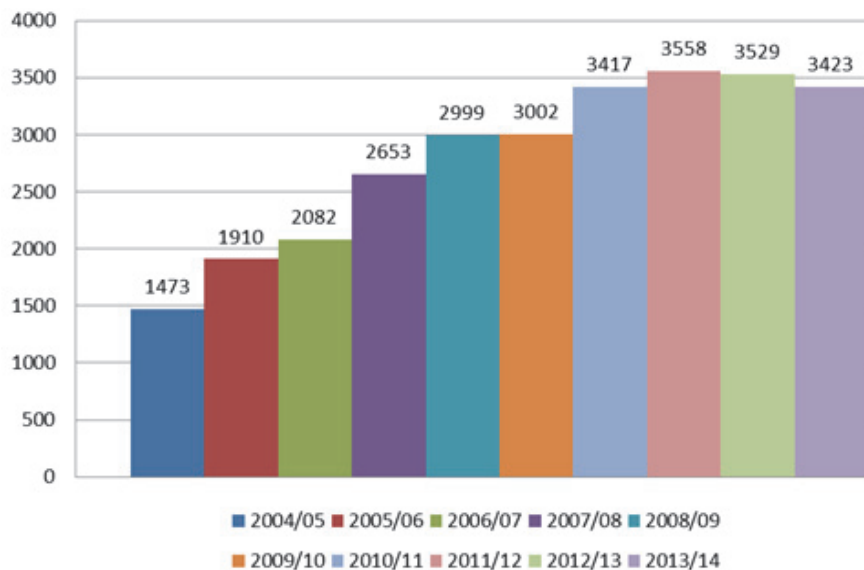
Most of the measures analysed above address the tiers enumerated. Idea and purpose of internationalization are emphasized in most of the international documents (Bologna Declaration and the following documents). International and national legal framework mostly addresses tasks at mezzo and also at micro tiers, sometimes at macro level. Consequently, if tasks are effectively attuned, they provide solid pre-conditions for systemic developments. Therefore, at this stage of the study, it is important to note that tiers of internationalization and tasks for higher education (including legal framework to implement them) are inter-related, however, still discernible.

At micro level several indicators of internationalization of higher education are enumerated (Juknyte – Petreikiene, 2006): coherence between mission and strategic goals of an individual

institution of higher education to international strategies; quality of necessary information; competence of students in internationalized study program; competence of teachers in such programs; publications in foreign language; mobility (number of incoming students; number of outgoing students; number of visiting professors); participation of students and teachers in joint research and other projects. This list illustrates our thesis suggested above: even if indicators are formulated for an individual institution of higher education, however, these indicators will not be effective without a solid and reliable political, national and international legal framework, and without a joint public agreement and support.

As an example: one of the important indicators of internationalization is transferability of credits. Obviously, the system should be operable at micro level: each institution of higher education should have study process attuned accordingly; however, without national and international underlying legally binding agreements the system will not work. The example enables us formulating second thesis: formulation of indicators of internationalization of higher education is an overly ambitious task; possibly, the task may result in a long list of indicators, which will not generate comprehensive picture in the end. Therefore separation of macro-mezzo-micro tiers - we suggest - may serve the purpose adequately, without enumeration of list of indicators in each tier. Further on some of the indicators will be addressed with a special focus on achievements and remaining critical issues. At a time of this study, the study credits in Lithuania are harmonized to the ECTS, which in its own turn facilitates a student-orientated study process, delivery of joint study programs and academic mobility.

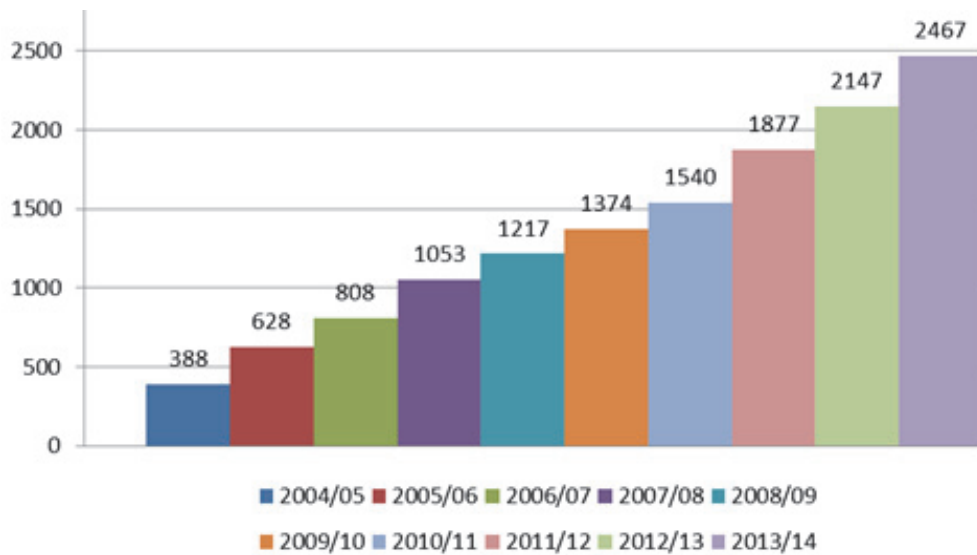
Figure 1. Outgoing Lithuanian students (Erasmus program)



Source: European Commission information (http://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/statistics_en).

It can be noted that Lithuania is among the top sending countries when counting the ratio between the students going to Erasmus and the whole number of students (European Commission, 2015). The analysis of recent data shows positive dynamics in the field of mutual exchange under the Erasmus program, Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

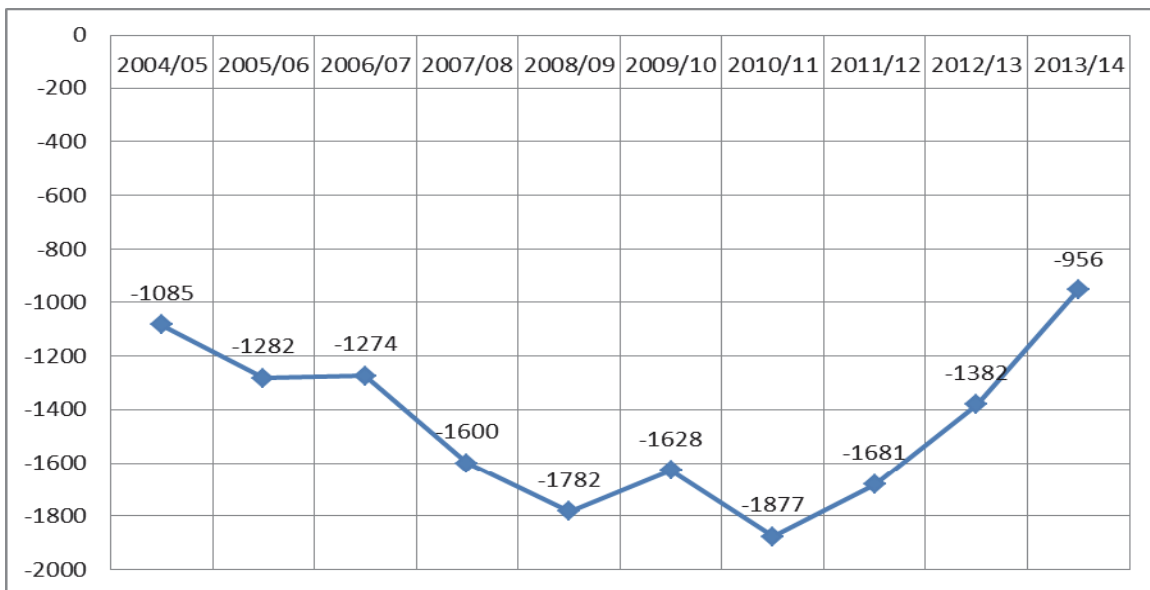
Figure 2. Incoming students to Lithuanian higher education (Erasmus program)



Source: European Commission information (http://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/statistics_en).

Figure 3 shows the difference between outgoing and incoming students, so far the average difference was 1455 students.

Figure 3. The difference between outgoing and incoming Erasmus students in Lithuania



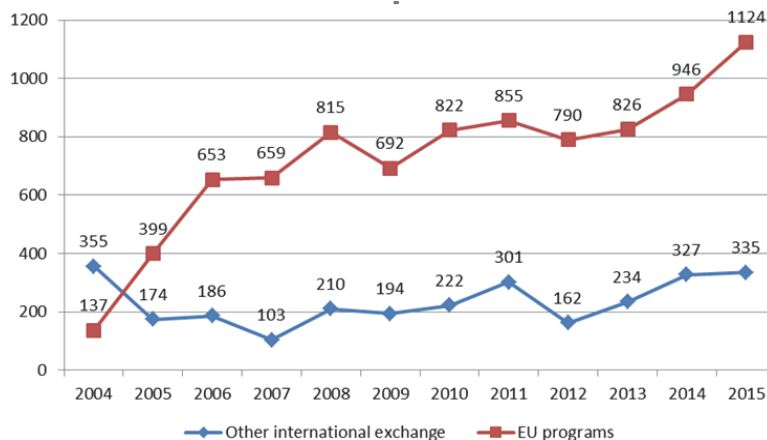
Source: own work.

Selickaitė and Reklaitienė indicate that Lithuania has good perspectives for successful implementation of the goals of Erasmus program, but note that it should strive to solve the problem of the negative balance between the outgoing and incoming students. (Selickaitė and Reklaitienė, 2015).

The possible threat from such trends is that it may cause brain draining and can have negative consequences on Lithuania’s intellectual welfare and economic development in the future. (Selickaitė and Reklaitienė, 2015).

Another dimension of the internationalization of Lithuanian higher education is its attractiveness for students, who come to study with other programs (Fig. 4) or without using any supporting mobility programs (Fig. 5).

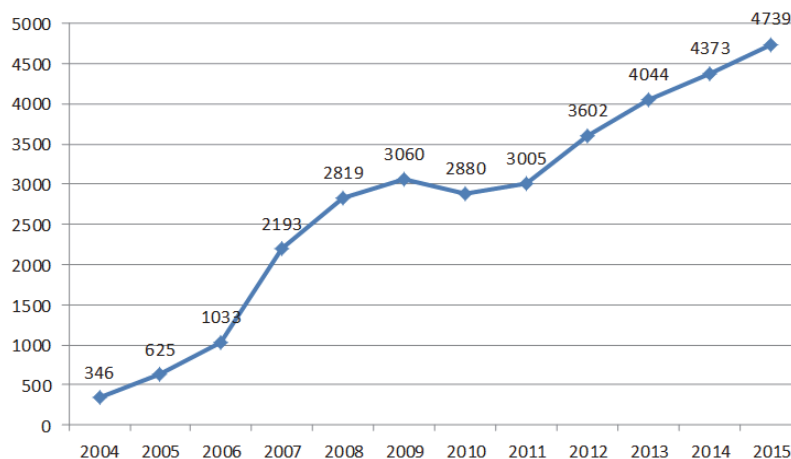
Figure 4. Foreign students in Lithuanian universities (other international exchange and EU programs)



Source: Statistics Department of the Republic of Lithuania (www.stat.gov.lt).

This might outweigh the negative impact of the data mentioned above, as there are approximately 3,5 to 4 times more students coming on their own initiative than the shortage of Erasmus students mentioned above.

Figure 5. Foreign students in Lithuanian universities, arriving on their own initiative



Source: Statistics Department of the Republic of Lithuania (www.stat.gov.lt).

On the other hand, the influence on the labour market of the Erasmus program manifests itself in another aspect – the students who participate in the program are apt to find future employment

more easily as the participation in Erasmus program greatly influences subsequent employability and professional careers of the participants. "Erasmus mobility contributes to the acquisition of multiple skills and competencies, which are highly valued by future employers, but also constitutes a valuable social and cultural experience" (Bryła, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

With scope of purposes and indicators of internationalization of higher education with an emphasis on the international legal framework for developments towards internationalization of Lithuanian higher education, the analysis above enables to conclude:

- Scope and content of internationalization may be conceptualized as having several tiers: macro, mezzo and micro. Macro tier assigns higher education with the role to contribute to positive developments in society and economies, to democracy and cohesion. Mezzo tier assigns higher education with a task to provide students with high level educational services in order to help graduates to acquire necessary competencies. Micro tier assigns higher education institutions with task to organize their activities in order to secure achievement of tasks at mezzo and macro tiers;
- International and national legal framework addresses tasks at all tiers: macro, mezzo and micro; if effectively attuned, they provide solid pre-requisites for systemic operation. Tasks for higher education for internationalization (and legal framework to implement them) are inter-related, however, still discernible;
- In Lithuania both idea and purpose of internationalization gained support by general public, national authorities and authorities of individual higher education institutions. The numbers of students incoming and outgoing of Lithuania in the framework of Erasmus program is increasing but the negative difference between the outgoing and incoming Erasmus students could be addressed by the Lithuanian authorities. Its negative influence is outweighed by the steadily increasing number of foreign students coming to study to Lithuania without any supporting exchange programs.
- Most of the measures that serve as indicators for internationalization are implemented: academic mobility (including credit transfer system, the coherent three cycle system), foreign publications, recognition of study degrees and qualifications, quality assurance and enhancement, investment into competence of university teachers, encouraging more effective cooperation between higher education institutions and other stake holders, especially, employers, investment into infrastructure of higher education institutions, and above all - a reliable legal framework - all serve building a reputable international profile of the system.

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