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Shaping a (responsible) European citizen?

Analysing European identity and citizenship in
the EU discourse on higher education

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Abstract

It is commonly acknowledged that the European Union (EU) created the notion of a European identity, in order to foster a sense of belonging and identification with the European project among its citizens. The basic assumption to this is that one way to promote a European identity is through higher education and, in particular, student mobility.

This thesis sets out to explore how a European identity is constructed, shaped and promoted through the EU discourse on higher education. Based on a critical discourse analysis of selected EU policy documents and official promotional material from 2007 to 2013 I analyse and critically discuss the EU discourse on higher education. Social constructivism and the concepts of identity and citizenship constitute the theoretical background to this thesis. Furthermore, neoliberalism sets the context of higher education in Europe.

The focus of this research is twofold. First, I explore how a European identity and citizenship is constructed and shaped through the EU discourse on higher education. The results of the analysis show that symbols, such as the Erasmus programme, the European (cultural and linguistic) diversity and the shared past, present and future of Europe build the basis on which a European identity feeling can emerge. The second research purpose is to uncover the EU discourse on higher education and student mobility and to discuss how it is linked to the promotion of a European identity. One of the main findings is that the EU discourse on higher education is connected to neoliberal ideology. Competition and mobility are two overarching themes in the EU discourse on higher education. Furthermore, I show that the notion of European identity is filled with certain ideas and characteristics (such as flexibility, lifelong learning, employability), which are promoted through the EU discourse on higher education. Finally, student mobility and education are depicted not only as fundamental rights, but increasingly as duties and obligations of (responsible) European citizens.

Keywords:

Discourse Analysis, European Identity, European Citizenship, Higher Education, Neoliberalism, Student Mobility

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Introduction

In 2012 the European Union (EU) celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Erasmus programme, Europe's most famous and successful educational student exchange programme. At the same time, in a majority of EU countries the financial crisis has led to significant cuts on education budgets.¹ Meanwhile, the European Commission proposed a budget increase of 70% for the future educational programme *Erasmus for All*. This reflects the importance the EU ascribes to higher education and mobility, even (or especially) in times of crisis.

In current times of economic strain all over Europe, anti-EU parties are gathering strengths and Europeans tend to be again more sceptical and distant towards each other.² The economic crisis has caused European citizens to view their national governments more strongly as the core of their identities, and at the same time the sense of "Europeanness" among European citizens seems to have lessened.³ Against the backdrop of decreasing support for the European project and the EU in general (also reflected in decreasing turnout in European elections) the question of European identity and citizenship has been pointed out as a central concern for the European Union.⁴ The EU created the notion of a European identity and citizenship based on the assumption that a common identity is crucial for a deepened European integration.⁵ As Jaques Delors, former president of the European Commission, once said: "You don't fall in love with a common market; you need something else."⁶ The quote reflects that economic integration alone is not considered to be sufficient to create a united Europe and a sense of belonging to the European level. A

¹ In some countries the cuts on educational budgets were of more than 5%. For more detailed information see: Eurydice Funding, "Funding of Education in Europe 2000-2012: The Impact of the Economic Crisis, Eurydice Report," February 2013, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Accessed April 29, 2013. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/147EN.pdf

² This scepticism towards other Europeans became visible when for example in Greek demonstrations against austerity measures German leaders were depicted as Nazis or Southern Europeans are presented as lazy cheats.

³ Neil Fligstein, Alina Polyakova and Wayne Sandholtz, "European Integration, Nationalism and European Identity," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, 1 (2012): 107.

⁴ Gert Biesta, "What kind of citizenship for European higher education? Beyond the competent active citizen," *European Educational Research Journal* 8,2 (2009): 146.

⁵ Yannis Stavrakakis, "Passions of Identification: Discourse, Enjoyment, and European Identity," in *Discourse Theory in European Politics*, ed. David Howard and Jacob Torfing (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 81.

⁶ Jaques Delors in Robert Bideleux, "What Does It Mean to Be European? Problems of Building a Pan-European Identity," in *Uncertain Europe: Building a New European Security Order?* ed. Graham Timmins and Martin Smith (London: Routledge, 2001), 25.

common European identity is needed to make the Europeans more supportive of the European project and EU institutions.

One way to foster and promote this European identity is through higher education and, in particular, student mobility. It is generally acknowledged that at the outset of the Erasmus programme, the biggest student mobility programme, one of the main objectives was to promote a feeling of European identity among students.⁷ The assumption was, and still is, that by studying abroad and by interacting with other European citizens, people will feel more attached to the EU and to the European integration process and will, consequently, develop emotional support for the European project.⁸ Based on this assumption, a large amount of research has been conducted to examine the actual relationship between student mobility and the emergence of a European identity. A number of quantitative studies have been trying to prove that mobile students tend to identify more as European, compared to non-mobile students.⁹ Others have focused on the individual experience a mobility period abroad has on the students' (European) identity.¹⁰ Recently a debate emerged as to whether students who choose to be mobile during their studies do actually already identify as European before their mobility period.¹¹

However, very little research has been done on what kind of European identity is actually promoted and fostered from the EU institutions and through the EU discourse. Some researchers examined various or very specific EU policy fields with regards to the way a European identity is defined.¹² Others focused exclusively on the category of European

⁷ For example: Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of knowledge: ideas, institutions and policy entrepreneurship in European Community higher education policy, 1955-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Or: Neil Fligstein, *Euroclash: The EU, European identity, and the future of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸ Neil Fligstein, *Euroclash: The EU, European identity, and the future of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 181.

⁹ Russel King and Enric Ruiz-Gelices, "International student migration and the European 'year abroad': effects on European identity and subsequent migration behaviour," *International Journal of Population Geography* 9 (2003): 229-252. Or Emmanuel Sigalas, "Cross-border mobility and European identity: The effectiveness of intergroup contact during the ERASMUS year abroad," *European Union Politics* 11,2 (2011): 241-265.

¹⁰ For example Marta J. Eichsteller, "Identity process under construction: European identity and educational mobility in the case study of Majka," in *The Evolution of European Identities: Biographical Approaches*, ed. Robert Miller and Graham Day, 61-75, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

¹¹ Theresa Kuhn, "Why Educational Exchange Programmes Miss their Mark: Cross-border Mobility, Education and European Identity," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50,6 (2012): 994-1010. And: Iain Wilson, "What should we expect of 'Erasmus generations'?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49,5 (2011): 1113-1140.

¹² For example Bee investigated the definition of a European identity given by the European Commission in general (Cristiano Bee, "The institutionally constructed European identity: public sphere and citizenship

citizenship¹³ or compared the construction of a European identity to that of a national one.¹⁴ Despite their different foci, these scholarly works have served as a basis and inspiration for the work developed in this thesis.

Research focus and questions

This thesis takes the moment of the European economic crisis, which led to a decreasing feeling of a European identity among European citizens, to examine how the EU promotes a European identity and citizenship. By a critical discourse analysis of policy documents and official promotional material on higher education from the EU institutions, the purpose of this thesis is to analyse and discuss the EU higher education discourse and explore how a European identity is constructed and shaped.

For that, the leading research questions are:

- What kind of European identity and citizenship is promoted through the EU discourse and how are these notions constructed and shaped?
- What is the EU discourse with regards to higher education and student mobility and how is it linked to the construction of a European identity?

Structure of thesis

This thesis began with a short introduction, followed by a presentation of the research focus and questions. Thereafter I will continue with the methodological considerations pertinent to this thesis by introducing critical discourse analysis and outlining the research process. Then I move on to contextualise the background of this thesis by describing how higher education and academic mobility came onto the agenda of the EU and by briefly reviewing the most relevant European educational programmes and initiatives. As

narrated by the Commission,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 9,4 (2008): 431-450.) whereas Sassatelli analysed the communication on the European City of Culture Programme (Monica Sassatelli, “Imagined Europe: The Shaping of a European Cultural Identity Through EU Cultural Policy,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2002): 435-451.).

¹³ See for example: Gert Biesta, “What kind of citizenship for European higher education? Beyond the competent active citizen,” *European Educational Research Journal* 8,2 (2009): 146-158. Or: Peo Hansen, “European Citizenship, or Where Neoliberalism Meets Ethno-Culturalism: Analysing the European Union’s citizenship discourse,” *European Societies* 2,2 (2000): 139-165.

¹⁴ Jonna Johansson, “Learning To Be (come) A Good European: A Critical Analysis of the Official European Union Discourse on European Identity and Higher Education,” PhD dissertation, Institutionen för ekonomisk och industriell utveckling Linköping, 2008.

theoretical background, social constructivism will be briefly discussed with a special focus on the concepts of identity and citizenship and their history in the EU. Furthermore, I give a short account of neoliberalism and some key themes as a background to the neoliberal agenda that has been adopted by the EU with regards to its politics in higher education.

In the analysis I first examine how a European identity is constructed and shed light on what the category of European citizenship implies. Then I discuss the EU discourse on higher education and how it aims to shape and determine the characteristics of a European citizen.

I conclude the thesis by presenting a concise summary of the analysis of the EU discourse on higher education, reflecting on its results and giving an outlook for further research.

Key concepts

In the thesis I use a few key concepts. The following shall give an outline on how I understand and use those concepts.

EU Discourse

Generally, discourse is a contested concept with a variety of meanings. In general, discourse can have the form of spoken or written language, non-verbal communication and semiotic practice.¹⁵ Its meaning stretches “from a genre to a register or style, from a building to a political programme.”¹⁶ Jørgensen and Phillips provide a useful and simple definition of discourse as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world".¹⁷

For this thesis I will analyse text in form of written discourse contained within official European Union policy documents and promotional material on higher education and mobility. Therefore, when I refer to EU discourse I mean the ideas, norms and

¹⁵ Norman Fairclough, “Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the universities,” *Discourse & Society*, 4,2 (1993): 134.

¹⁶ Ruth Wodak, “Introduction: Discourse Studies - Important Concepts and Terms,” in *Qualitative discourse analysis in the social sciences*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyzanowski (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 1.

¹⁷ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 1.

presuppositions about different phenomena and concepts that are contained in the analysed EU documents.

Mobility

I refer to mobility as an educational movement from the country of residence to another country abroad, to enrol in a higher education institution for academic activity. The mobility can take place between European countries or from a non-European country to Europe and vice-versa. It might take place as short-term credit mobility (for example Erasmus exchange semester) or as long-term mobility to obtain a degree. The minimum duration of such a mobility period is three months and can extend to the whole duration of the study programme (e.g. 12 or 24 months for a Masters degree and 36 months for a Bachelors degree).¹⁸

Identity

This thesis will use the identity concept as collective identity. Collective identity is not “about ‘I’ or ‘Me’, but about that part of ‘me’ that belongs to a larger ‘we’, a social group and/or a community”.¹⁹ Certainly there are approaches to study the individual aspects of a European identity,²⁰ but in this thesis I am only interested in a conceptualisation of identity as a collective, and in particular the conceptualisation of a European identity. Collective belonging means, that an individual needs a wider group with whom he/she can share an identity and together create a collective identity. This identity can be based on perceptions of commonalities in culture, heritage, language, religion, nationality, gender, social class or age that produce a shared identity and therefore can build the foundation of a collective identity.²¹

¹⁸ Council of the European Union, “Commission Staff working paper on the development of benchmarks on education and training for employability and on learning mobility,” 10697/11, May 24, 2011: 12.

¹⁹ Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 22.

²⁰ See for example Robert Miller and Graham Day, *The Evolution of European Identities: Biographical Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²¹ Neil Fligstein, *Euroclash: The EU, European identity, and the future of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 130.

Methodological considerations

As method I have chosen to carry out a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of official EU documents. Critical discourse analysis is used as a theoretical background and research tool by a variety of fields of study (e.g. anthropology, psychology, political science, etc.). Embedded in the theory of social constructivism one of the common assumptions is that discourse constructs collective identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and meaning.²² It is because of the ascribed power to identity construction that I decided to carry out critical discourse analysis of the EU higher education discourse and investigate how it constructs the notion of a European identity and citizenship.

Critical discourse analysis

CDA is a broad field, including varieties of approaches and it is easy to get lost in a maze of different theories and methodologies. Therefore, as starting point I will draw upon Roger's approach and methodology, who states that CDA must contain three general characteristics: 1) discourse, 2) it has to be critical 3) and analysis.²³

Discourse is generally ascribed a wide array of meanings. One popular definition of discourse comes from Fairclough who describes discourse as a system of reproduction of reality, in which discursive practices are affected by the discourse.²⁴ This implies a dialectic relationship between on the one side the discursive event and on the other side the situations, institutions and social structures that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, while at the same time it shapes the others.²⁵ This definition only represents one possible way of defining discourse. Regardless of how a researcher defines or uses discourse analysis, the meaning of discourse is always closely linked to one's specific research context and theoretical approach.²⁶ It is therefore something that did not exist before in its current format, but which is also constructed by the researcher during the process of social research.

²² Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, 67.

²³ Rebecca Rogers, *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 10.

²⁴ Fairclough, *Critical discourse analysis*, 134.

²⁵ Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Teun van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997), 258. As quoted in: Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory, and methodology," in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2009), 6.

²⁶ Wodak, *Introduction Discourse Studies*, 6.

One of the common assumptions of CDA is its focus on the de-construction of power relations through critique. ‘Critical’ means to investigate and analyse power relationships and inequities embedded in society.²⁷ No information should be treated as objective truth, why it is important that in the analysis the researcher takes a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge.²⁸ Wodak and Philips describe this ‘critical’ essence as trying to raise awareness and to produce critical knowledge “that enables individuals to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection”.²⁹ In this thesis, I use ‘critical’ mainly in the sense of making things visible, which means in particular uncovering how the EU aims to construct a European identity through discourse.

Another basic principle is that CDA shall always be analytical and interpretative.³⁰ As diverse as the different existing CDA theories, there are no common, easy-to-follow instructions on how to carry out a discourse analysis. However, there are some basic assumptions, which I see as helpful for my analysis. First, the approach of the researcher shall always be problem-oriented rather than theory-oriented or focusing only on specific linguistic items.³¹ This means also that the context of the specific problem shall be considered. Second, the used theory and methodology shall be varied and adapted to understand the social phenomena under investigation.³² The analytic procedures always depend on the research situation, the analysed text and the research question(s). It is always the researcher who guides the theory and method of CDA.³³ Finally, the researcher shall always aim to make his/her position explicit while remaining self-reflective of the personal research process.

My position in the discourse

A researcher never takes a passive role in the process of analysis, but takes a rather active role influencing the selection and interpretation of themes. The forthcoming analysis will always be based on my interpretations as a researcher, inevitably influenced by my own

²⁷ Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, “Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory, and methodology,” in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2009), 7.

³⁰ Rogers, *An introduction to critical discourse analysis*, 2.

³¹ Teun Van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Studies: A Sociocognitive Approach,” in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2009), 63.

³² Wodak and Meyer, *Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory, and methodology*, 31.

³³ Rogers, *An introduction to critical discourse analysis*, 3.

subjective reading and the way I perceive matters in the field of higher education. Even though this could be considered a limitation of my research, van Dijk argues that critical discourse analysts should always take an explicit position in the discourse, being clear about their point of view, perspective and principles.³⁴ Therefore, I would like to start by giving some information on my personal background and standpoint with which I attempt to give the reader the possibility to follow my train of thought and keep a critical eye on my analysis.

My position in the field is characterised by my personal experience of working directly and indirectly with mobility programmes for higher education at European level.³⁵ Furthermore, I have experienced mobility personally as a mobile student and professional worker. My former experience in higher education and mobility means that I am of course biased. But I also regard it as an advantage for understanding scholarly discussions, documents and concepts since I am already familiar with the field.

During the process of thesis writing I have thought and read a lot about higher education, educational mobility and its purposes. My fundamental conviction is that higher education should be open to everybody. The role of higher education institutions is not only to provide society with employable graduates, but also to educate students and to contribute to personal growth. This means that I consider the purpose of education to be in first place to acquire knowledge and to develop and utilise analytical skills. At the end of their studies graduates should be prepared for their future life in terms of employment but also personally with the ability to think critically and to act accordingly. In the current times of economic crisis, I do think that students need to be prepared and equipped adequately, and in this sense it is important that universities take into account what is needed from the labour market.

I have always perceived mobility as something positive, representing a unique opportunity for personal and professional development. Therefore, I fully support mobility and scholarship schemes and believe that everybody should have the possibility to spend a study period or obtain a full degree abroad. Through my work in the management and

³⁴ Teun Van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Discourse Society* 4 (1993): 252.

³⁵ I have worked at two universities in the International Relations Office as project manager of European Erasmus Mundus scholarship schemes. Furthermore, I expanded my knowledge of higher education in traineeships at the European University Association (EUA) and the European Commission (Directorate General for Education and Culture).

award of scholarships, I could personally witness how a mobility experience can have a great impact on individuals, in terms of personal development, knowledge acquisition and language competences.

Regardless of my personal opinion and standpoint, throughout this thesis I tried to display a broad picture of the different currents and opinions regarding the EU discourse on higher education.

The research process

I decided to take the start of the worldwide financial crisis in the year 2007 as the start of the time-span for the analysis. The crisis started with a recession in the US and was followed a year later by the property bubble burst and the banking crisis in Europe. Due to the discussions on European identity, which arose again with the European economic crisis,³⁶ it seemed to be a good starting point for analysing the EU discourse.

Based on the concrete research topic of this thesis and in order to control the amount of information to analyse I decided to look only at documents on higher education that at least partially touch upon mobility. This might represent a limitation of this thesis in the sense that with this selection I might have neglected other relevant documents and information. Another limitation of the thesis, which comes along with the selection of documents, is that the selected documents do not represent a full list of official EU publications on higher education. However, I claim that the selected documents still provide sufficient information to answer my research questions.

When it comes to analysing documents and discourse, there are two useful questions. One is to ask who issued the document and therefore controlled the discourse, and the other is to ask what the targeted audience is. In total, I analysed 39 official documents, with a more or less equal share of documents from the European Commission, from the European Parliament, Council of Ministers and the European Council and official EU publications. I also included two documents from the Ministerial Conferences of the Bologna Process, which in strict sense are not official EU documents, but they nevertheless proved to be important especially with regards to the discussion on mobility in higher education.

³⁶ See for example Neil Fligstein, Alina Polyakova and Wayne Sandholtz, "European Integration, Nationalism and European Identity," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, 1 (2012): 106-122.

The nature of the analysed documents range from legislative texts, directives, reports and press releases, to promotional material such as flyers or brochures. Since the European Commission is in charge of policy initiation, its documents contain new proposals and general discussions and reflections on the topic of higher education. Documents from the European Parliament, European Council and Council of Ministers are mostly standardised and streamlined documents stating concrete decisions or reports. In the analysis it became clear that the documents are closely interlinked, and often build up on each other, in the way that the same or similar text passages were used in several documents. Most of the analysed documents are targeted at policy makers or staff working at governmental or institutional level in higher education. The other part of the analysed documents was made up of promotional material such as brochures and leaflets. These publications are directed at a wider public including the actual targeted audience – the students themselves.

The first step in the analysis process was an initial reading of the official EU documents trying to allow main leading concepts to emerge rather than pre-defining them. However, it can be argued that I have been influenced by my previous work experience where certain buzzwords (such as employability, added European dimension, etc.) are uttered continuously in the context of higher education and mobility.

The first reading of the official EU documents went hand-in-hand with a thorough literature review around the main themes of the thesis such as student mobility, European identity, neoliberalism and the theoretical background of constructivism. This way I got useful hints about further policy documents that could prove as important and relevant for the analysis. Once a thorough analysis of all documents was completed, it became clear that there were only very few direct references to a European identity as such. However, the documents made reference to a variety of other concepts, that are directly linked with the discussion on identity and citizenship and which I investigated further in the analytical chapter of this thesis. These other concepts lay the foundations for what a European identity is made of (e.g. the shared cultural heritage and symbols, Europe's diversity and a common past) and at the same time, frame how a person identifying as a European should behave (being competitive, employable, flexible, lifelong learning, etc.).

Higher education context

A critical analysis of the EU discourse on higher education cannot be complete without trying to understand the historical context in which the EU got involved in the area of education. The following section will outline first how education and more in particular academic mobility came to the agenda of the EU. Then the most relevant European educational programmes and initiatives with focus on student mobility will be introduced.

The role of the EU in higher education

Education is often presented as a cornerstone of European integration. Though, at the beginning of the creation of the European Union the main objectives were exclusively laid around economic integration, since economy was regarded to be able to bring former enemies to engage together in a supranational project. It was only until much later that education came to play a role.³⁷

Robertson identified three policy trajectories, which prove useful when analysing and understanding the evolution of higher education in Europe.³⁸ In the first phase of policy development, ‘Crossing National Boundaries’ (from 1955-1992), higher education was mainly seen as a means for creating Europe as a region and developing its elites.³⁹ Culturally this phase was characterised by creating a European citizen with a European sensibility. From an economic perspective, the emphasis was put on creating a pool of graduates for the European labour market and politically speaking, providing the new intelligentsia for the European government. Since the Treaties of Rome had not given any competency for the area of education yet, education came only to the forefront of the supranational level in the early 1970s with the creation of the European University Institute in 1971.⁴⁰ Without doubt the most important and visible policy development with regards to educational mobility was the creation of the Erasmus programme in 1987, offering the possibility for higher education students to spend a study period abroad.

³⁷ Luce Pépin, “The History of EU Cooperation in the Field of Education and Training: How Lifelong Learning Became a Strategic Objective,” *European Journal of Education* 42,1 (2007): 122.

³⁸ Susan Robertson, “Europe, competitiveness and higher education: An evolving project,” in *Globalisation and Europeanisation in Education*, ed. Robert Dale and Susan Robertson (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2009), 66-83.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-69.

⁴⁰ Ann Corbett, “Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurs: towards a new history of higher education in the European Community,” *European Journal of Education* 38,3 (2003): 315-330.

The second policy phase ‘Creating the New Europe and Europe of Knowledge Through Blurring National Boundaries’ (1992-2003) started with a shift in higher education policy, marked by the Maastricht Treaty (1992) which formally defined EU competencies and thus gave the EU a more direct role in the field of education.⁴¹ In the context of an economic globalisation Robertson stresses the global transition to neoliberalism, which meant that Europe had to restructure in terms of market. The results were developments aiming at economic growth within Europe, such as the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through the Bologna Process.

The third phase ‘Destination Europe: the EHEA as lure’ began from 2003 when the EU took over a more globalising strategy in higher education.⁴² This phase was characterised by the launch of EU programmes, such as the Erasmus Mundus programme, and a strong emphasis was put on global competitiveness and the development of a European higher education market.

EU programmes and initiatives in higher education

The following section will give a brief outline of the main educational programmes and initiatives related to student mobility in higher education.

Erasmus

The *EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*, widely known by its acronym ERASMUS is the largest student mobility programme in Europe with an annual budget of more than 460 million Euros.⁴³ Throughout the last years developments the Erasmus programme has become the most visible of all European educational programmes and is today considered as the flagship of the educational programmes administered by the European Union.⁴⁴ Erasmus was initiated in 1987 (together with the creation of the Single European Act) as a self-standing programme that was built upon a pilot project of student exchanges during the years from 1981 to 1986. At the beginning the aim was to reach 10% of the student population who should spend an

⁴¹ Robertson, *Europe, competitiveness, higher education*, 69-73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 73-75.

⁴³ Erasmus, “The Erasmus programme in 2010-11: the figures explained,” accessed December 15, 2012. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-310_en.htm

⁴⁴ Oliver Bracht et al., *The Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility* (Kassel: INCHER, 2006), 7.

exchange period abroad. However, with only about 3 000 students in its first year to more than 230 000 students in the academic year 2011/2012, the numbers still only represent around 1% of the total student population of more than 22,5 million in the 32 participating countries.⁴⁵

Erasmus Mundus

The main mobility programme, Erasmus, was created with a European dimension. From 2003 on the EU took a more globalising strategy by launching the Erasmus Mundus programme that was characterised by its emphasis on international competitiveness and support for the development of a European higher education market.⁴⁶ The Erasmus Mundus programme, offering Joint Master and PhD degrees as well as scholarships for third country nationals to study in Europe, was created in the light of an increasing competition for international students in the international higher education market.

Bologna Declaration

The Bologna Process started as an intergovernmental project in 1999 when 29 governments committed to an institutional and structural reform process in higher education with the aim of creating a European Higher Education Area of compatible and comparable national systems. The Bologna process was set in place in form of a voluntary harmonisation process, which means without clauses of a binding contract.⁴⁷

The concrete outcomes of the Bologna process were on one hand the well-known (and criticised) two-cycle system of Bachelor and Master degrees. By now in more than half of the participating countries the share of students enrolled in a programme corresponding to the Bologna two-cycle system is more than 90%.⁴⁸ The other major development was the introduction of a system of credits (the European Credit Transfer System = ECTS), which

⁴⁵ Erasmus, *The Erasmus programme in 2010-11: the figures explained*.

⁴⁶ Robertson, *Europe, competitiveness, higher education*, 66-83.

⁴⁷ However, Henckel questions the voluntary nature of the process, since as he argues, if a country would decide not to follow the Bologna principles, the higher education system of this country would be completely out of tune with the rest of Europe, hence creating difficulties for student mobility, recognition of degrees, etc. For more information see: Susan Wright, "The Bologna process: a voluntary method of co-ordination and marketisation? Ole Henckel interview," *LATISS Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences* 1,2 (2008): 12.

⁴⁸ Eurydice EHEA, "The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report," accessed January 15, 2013: 9. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/138EN.pdf

allows students to move between and study in different institutions and countries. Both developments were contributing to the aim of facilitating intra-European mobility and its recognition.⁴⁹

Mobility has always been at the core of the Bologna process.⁵⁰ At the beginning, the enhancement of student mobility was set as a major strategic objective of the reform. Two particular aims were emphasised: on one hand facilitating intra-European mobility and minimising obstacles to freedom of movement, and on the other hand increasing the attractiveness of higher education in Europe for students from outside Europe. In the Bucharest Conference in 2012 the Ministers adopted a Mobility Strategy according to which “in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or a training period abroad”.⁵¹ Furthermore, the Ministers identified three key priorities to generate growth and jobs in Europe: 1) to increase student mobility, 2) to better equip students with employable skills and 3) to offer quality higher education for more students.

Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020 Strategy

While the Bologna process focused on institutional and structural reform processes in higher education, the Lisbon strategy, launched in 2000 by the European Council, focused on research policy in order to foster growth and jobs to make Europe the world’s most competitive knowledge economy. The Lisbon Strategy was the EU’s response to face the challenges of globalisation and demographic change.

In 2010 the European Council endorsed the Europe 2020 strategy, which absorbed the Lisbon strategy and pursues to help Europe to overcome and recover from the crisis by contributing to boost growth and employment. The Europe 2020 strategy identified three key drivers for growth which shall be accomplished through concrete actions at EU and national levels: smart growth (fostering knowledge, innovation, education and digital society), sustainable growth (making production more resource efficient while boosting Europe’s competitiveness) and inclusive growth (raising participation in the labour market,

⁴⁹ Nevertheless, there are discussions if the new system actually fostered mobility in Europe or if the new study structure discourages students from going abroad. See for example Ulrich Teichler, “Bologna - Motor or Stumbling Block for the Mobility and Employability of Graduates?” in *Employability and Mobility of Bachelor Graduates in Europe*, ed. Harald Schomburg and Ulrich Teichler (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 3-41.

⁵⁰ Eurydice EHEA, *Bologna Process Implementation Report*, 151.

⁵¹ EHEA, “History,” accessed January 15, 2013. <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=3>

the acquisition of skills and the fight against poverty).⁵² Education plays a key role in achieving these strategic priorities, in particular with regard to smart and inclusive growth.

Erasmus for All

The new programme *Erasmus for All* for Education, Youth and Sports, proposed by the Commission in 2011 and to be started in 2014, is the third European horizontal education programme after Socrates (1995-2006) and the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013). The name ‘Erasmus for All’ was proposed by the Commission based on the assumption that the name ‘Erasmus’ is widely recognised among the general public as a synonym of EU learner mobility but also for European values, such as multiculturalism and multilingualism.⁵³

The aim of Erasmus for All is to contribute to Europe 2020, the EU’s reform strategy for jobs and growth.⁵⁴ The new programme will divide up into three key actions (learning mobility, cooperation and policy reform) whereas learning mobility with its proposed 63% will represent a significant share of the overall budget.

Theoretical background and considerations

Before going into the core of the thesis, in the following chapter I present the theoretical background that will guide my analysis of the EU discourse. The following section will briefly introduce the social constructivist approach on European integration and (European) identity formation. It will lay an important theoretical foundation for the following analysis on how a European identity is constructed, shaped and promoted through the EU higher education discourse. Furthermore, I will briefly review the conceptualisation of the notion of identity and citizenship with a focus on their evolution and use in the EU.

⁵² Europa Bologna, “The Bologna process: setting up the European Higher Education Area,” accessed January 29, 2013. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11088_en.htm

⁵³ The European Parliament did not approve the proposal of the name and suggested “YES Europe” (standing for for ‘Youth, Education and Sports’ Europe). The discussions about the name are still ongoing as well as the concrete distribution of the final budget of the multi-annual financial framework to the different actions.

⁵⁴ Europa Erasmus for All, “*Erasmus for All. Investing in Europe’s education, training and youth*,” accessed December 15, 2012: 1. http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/leaflet_en.pdf

In the same way as the European project as such has been evolving over time, so have been theories studying the phenomena of European integration. Diez and Wiener describe the theorisation of the European integration process with three phases, whereas each focuses on different themes, questions and theories.⁵⁵ The aim of the first phase, starting in the 1960s, was to explain and discover the roots of the integration process on the basis of theories such as intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism. The second phase (1980s onwards) focused on analysing governance and understanding political processes based on theories such as neofunctionalism and liberal-intergovernmentalism.

For this thesis, the third phase, representing a constructivist turn in European integration theories is the most interesting and insightful phase. With the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, which also gave the European Union a direct role in education, the main focus of European studies was put on discovering the conceptualisation of the integration process and governance, and the consequences the integration process had for constructing identities.⁵⁶ The constructivists brought the analysis of dominant discourses, the role of ideas and shared beliefs, and the processes of communicative action into the research agenda of EU studies.⁵⁷

Before starting to explain what constructivists say about European integration, it is important to note that a constructivist theory of European integration as such has not been formulated.⁵⁸ Constructivism rather represents an ontological perspective or meta-theory, which can be used for analysing the European integration.⁵⁹ Several analyses of EU politics have been inspired by constructivism and as Checkel states “[c]onstructivist approaches to the study of Europe are trendy”.⁶⁰

Constructivism and (European) identity

First of all, it should be noted that in the context of the European Union the concept of European integration and the emergence of a European identity are closely interlinked.

⁵⁵ Thomas Diez and Antje Wiener, *European Integration Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵⁶ Cristiano Bee, “The institutionally constructed European identity: public sphere and citizenship narrated by the Commission,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 9,4 (2008): 436.

⁵⁷ Ben Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 173.

⁵⁸ Frank Schimmelpfennig, “Integration Theory,” in *Research Agendas in EU Studies: Stalking the Elephant*, ed. Michelle Egan, Neill Nugent, and William E. Paterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41.

⁵⁹ Thomas Risse, “Social constructivism and European integration,” in *European Integration Theory* ed. Wiener, Antje and Thomas Diez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 159.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Constructivist approaches to European integration,” *ARENA Working Paper* 6 (2006): 4.

Constructivists emphasise the nature of European integration as a process that is continuously changing and developing. The main assumption is that political integration is a tool to stabilize the system and achieve security within a region in order to prevent war.⁶¹ According to the theory of transactionalism by Deutsch et al. integration would occur in situations of high international transaction.⁶² International integration is a dynamic process based on transactions in forms of capital flows, labour migration, student mobility, tourism and other types of international exchanges and interactions. These interactions are expected to lead to learning processes that foster a common identity. In this regard, European integration can be described as a process of community building of groups that share common values and a collective identity.⁶³ The stronger the collective identity and wider the pool of common beliefs, the more established will the integration be.⁶⁴

Building on Deutsch's theory of interaction, Fligstein summarizes that "if there is going to be a European national identity, it will arise from people who associate with each other across national boundaries and experience that association in a positive way".⁶⁵ Behind this assumption stands the idea that social interactions in form of personal inter-cultural contact can help to overcome national prejudices, rectify stereotypes and make people approximate their perceptions and norms. That means, if people from different European societies are in regular contact and interaction they will recognize that their counterparts are similar to them, and will start to view them as part of the same overarching group in Europe, "the Europeans".⁶⁶ By interacting with each other, people approximate each other's ideas, perceptions and values. That means, at least in theory, the more people cross borders to live, study and interact with other Europeans, the better the prospects for a collective overarching European identity.⁶⁷

However, there are conditions that may threaten the emergence of a collective identity. So can for example conditions of crisis and turbulence affect and weaken established ties of

⁶¹ Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration*, 43.

⁶² Karl Deutsch, et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1957), in Theresa Kuhn, "Why Educational Exchange Programmes Miss their Mark: Cross-border Mobility, Education and European Identity," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50,6 (2012): 997.

⁶³ Schimmelpfennig, *Integration Theory*, 41.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁵ Neil Fligstein, "Who are the Europeans and how does this matter for politics?" in *European identity* ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 136.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁷ Emmanuel Sigalas, "Does ERASMUS Student Mobility promote a European identity?" *conWEB, Webpapers on Constitutionalism & Governance beyond the State* 2 (2009): 5. http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sowi/conweb/conweb_wiener/2009/conweb_2_2009.pdf

social cohesion and therefore represent a critical situation for identities.⁶⁸ In the case of Europe, the situation of the current economic crisis, in which anti-EU parties are gathering strength, has led to a resurgence of neo-nationalism, which made people feel again more attached to their national identity.⁶⁹

Finally, viewing European integration through the lenses of constructivism emphasizes the connection between structure and actors, and how they affect each other. Agents and structures are mutually influenced, which means that the social environment in form of institutions with its rules and norms defines, shapes and constitutes the interests, preferences and collective identities of social beings. For the case of Europeans living in Europe it means that the structures of the EU influences cognitive schemas and behavioural practices through a continuous process of identity building.⁷⁰ This means that identities, such as the European identity, are not given per se, but they arise in situations of interaction and are socially constructed through discourses, which shape the way we think about ourselves and the world.⁷¹

The structure under research in this thesis is the EU discourse on higher education that I argue aims to shape and influence the behaviour and identities of the students, which are the main social actors in the constitution of a European identity. It is these structures, in form of the discourses of European institutions issuing policy documents, agreements, reports and promoting educational programmes that I attempt to identify and analyse in this thesis.

What is identity?

Drawing from a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology and social psychology, the next section outlines a few central aspects of the concept of identity and in particular of European identity. These will serve as a theoretical foundation for the forthcoming analysis where different ways of constructing European identity will be explored.

⁶⁸ Bo Stråth, "A European Identity: To the Historical Limits of a Concept," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002): 387.

⁶⁹ Cris Shore, "The euro crisis and European citizenship. The euro 2011-2012 – celebration or commemoration?" *Anthropology Today* 28, 2 (2012): 8.

⁷⁰ Risse, *Community of Europeans*, 22.

⁷¹ Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration*, 122.

As already mentioned before, in my thesis I focus on the concept of European identity as a collective phenomenon. Brubaker and Cooper describe collective identities as the “emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders.”⁷² The first part of the quote refers to the assumption that a group of people needs to feel a communality that causes them to feel unity and loyalty between each other. These communalities, also described as a kind of cultural story that unites social groups, can be a common history, language, religion or culture.⁷³ The latter part of the quote indicates that a collective identity is always based on difference and comparison. A collective needs the construction of an ‘other’, in order to distinguish and frame oneself on response to this other group.⁷⁴ A lot of scholarly discussion is going on about how to frame Europe and this ‘other’. In this discussion a particularly interesting aspect is the one of the creation of a European identity with a view of increasingly expanding borders of the EU.⁷⁵

A third assumption and central part in the theory on identity is the famous concept of “imagined communities”, introduced by Benedict Anderson in 1983.⁷⁶ Communities are imagined because most members of a community have never met personally, but still feel that they are somehow connected and belong together. With regard to a European identity the idea of imagined community becomes even clearer, because it is impossible to know all other 500 million Europeans. However, as a German I can still feel that I belong to the same group as an Italian.

Another important aspect is that European identity should not be regarded in zero-sum terms; if I hold a European identity it does not mean that I am excluded to feel part of other groups.⁷⁷ As an individual I can identify with the region of my origin, with my country of origin, or with Europe as a whole. For example I might feel attached to Cologne when I

⁷² Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘identity’,” *Theory and Society* 29,1 (2000): 19.

⁷³ Fligstein, *Euroclash*, 124.

⁷⁴ Fligstein et al., *European Integration, Nationalism and European Identity*, 108.

⁷⁵ For further research on the issue of EU enlargement and its impact on European identity formation see for example: Adrian Favell and Tina Nebe, “Internal and External Movers: East-West Migration and the Impact of EU Enlargement,” in *Pioneers of European Integration: Citizenship and Mobility in the EU*, ed. Ettore Recchi and Adrian Favell, 120-155, Elgar: Cheltenham, 2009.

⁷⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁷⁷ Risse, *Community of Europeans*, 22.

visit Berlin, German while living in Brussels and particularly European when I travel outside Europe.

Finally, a useful distinction for the forthcoming analysis is the differentiation into cultural and civic components of identity. This differentiation stands for the identification with a cultural community on the one hand, and on the other hand the identification with a political structure.⁷⁸ From a civic perspective citizens identify with the political structure, such as the EU and its set of institutions and rules that determine political life in community. These institutions and rules influence and shape the individual's values and perceptions of freedom, rights and obligations as an individual.⁷⁹ The cultural component, describes the sense of belonging towards a particular political group that shares values, language, history, myths or other social similarities. Smith, in his study of nations and nationalism, emphasises the existence of shared memories, heritage and symbols that lay the foundation of any cultural identity.⁸⁰ These symbols will be further explored in the analysis of how a European identity is constructed.

History of European identity in the EU

The following section gives an outline of how European identity came onto the agenda of the EU, which will be important to the following analysis of how a European identity and citizenship is promoted and conceptualised in the current political practice in higher education of the EU.

The concept of European identity is the product of a long history of philosophical and political reflection on the idea of Europe. Academics agree that the concept of European identity emerged as a top-down strategy to foster support among the Europeans for the endeavour of a European project and has become an EU leitmotiv.⁸¹ During the early 1970s, in times of economic problems, European institutions saw in the concept of identity

⁷⁸ Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 103.

⁷⁹ Bruter, *Citizens of Europe*, 103.

⁸⁰ Anthony Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 56.

⁸¹ See for example: Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of knowledge: ideas, institutions and policy entrepreneurship in European Community higher education policy, 1955-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Or: Yannis Stavrakakis, "Passions of Identification: Discourse, Enjoyment, and European Identity" in *Discourse Theory in European Politics*, ed. David Howard and Jacob Torfing, 68-92, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

a new tool to attain popular support and legitimacy in order to create a sense of common belonging and identification with the European Union.⁸²

The declaration *Concerning European Identity* from 1973 represents a milestone in the EU discourse on European identity. In the declaration the by then nine Member states of the European Community addressed the internal dimensions (the unity inside the Community) and the external dimensions (the relation to the outside world) of the EU and a common identity. Based on a “common heritage” and “common values and principles” the Ministers viewed unity as a “basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization which they have in common”.⁸³ A European identity would evolve as a result “of the dynamic construction of a United Europe” and would be defined “in relation to other countries or groups of countries”.⁸⁴

From then on European identity started to appear in various official declarations and EU documents, like the Single European Act (1987), which stated “that closer co-operation on questions of European security would contribute in an essential way to the development of a European identity in external policy matters”.⁸⁵ The Maastricht Treaty (1992) refers to identity in the context of implementing a common foreign and security policy that might lead into “reinforcing the European identity and its independence in order to promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world”.⁸⁶ The concept of European identity appeared as well in a number of reports such as the Tindemans Report (1975), which stressed the value of creating a European identity. Education is described as an external sign of solidarity, according to which the European Union shall “encourage greater integration in educational matters by promoting student exchanges”.⁸⁷ Other reports, as the Adonnino report (1985), titled *A People’s Europe*, stressed the importance of common symbols for a united Europe, such as the European flag and a European passport, and suggested the Ode to Joy as European anthem.⁸⁸

⁸² Stavrakakis, *Discourse, Enjoyment, and European Identity*, 81.

⁸³ European Council, “Declaration on European Identity,” *Bulletin of the European Communities*, 12, (Copenhagen, December 14, 1973), 118.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸⁵ SEA, “Single European Act,” *Official Journal* L 169, 1987: 21.

⁸⁶ European Council, “Treaty on Maastricht,” *Official Journal* C 191, 1992: Preamble.

⁸⁷ Leo Tindemans, “European Union - Report by Mr. Leo Tindemans, Prime Minister of Belgium, to the European Council,” *Bulletin of the European Communities*, Supplement 1/76, 1976: 28.

⁸⁸ Pietro Adonnino, “A People’s Europe- Reports from the ad hoc Committee,” *Bulletin of the European Communities*, Supplement 7/85, 1985: 29.

And what about citizenship?

The concepts of citizenship and identity are closely interlinked. Whereas identity is something that is hard to be circumscribed, citizenship seems to be a more tangible category, since with the belonging to a nation-state we are automatically ascribed the citizenship of that state. I understand identity as more linked to a sense of belonging to a European culture, whereas citizenship is based on the civic aspect of identity, meaning the rights, rules and values of a citizen who is member of a political community with clear boundaries.

Since the 1980s citizenship has become a key concept in the EU discourse. Brubaker describes citizenship as an abstract and formal construct, which is characterised by its limited access to it.⁸⁹ Citizenship is granted or denied through the membership and belonging to a political community and implies a certain set of citizenship rights and responsibilities.

A distinctive feature of citizenship is its inclusive and at the same time exclusive character, reflected in the question of who belongs and who does not belong to the group or community. In this way, citizenship can be seen as a tool of inclusion, which gives all people of the same group the same rights and basic entitlements. At the same time it means that citizenship status always implies some kind of boundary construction, excluding the outsiders. These outsiders are excluded not because of what they are but because of what they are not – not being acknowledged as insiders.⁹⁰

Usually, citizenship is viewed as a status, established through the legal framework of citizenship, which comprises certain rights, duties and responsibilities that come along with the membership of a political community. In exchange of those rights citizens are expected to be loyal to the civic order they must defend and promote.⁹¹ As I will argue in the forthcoming analysis of how European citizenship is constructed, a new dimension is that citizens shall become active. ‘Active citizenship’ is a new form of citizenship that has emerged out of the concept of European citizenship. Whereas traditional citizenship was focused on rights and duties and electoral participation, the new version of active

⁸⁹ Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 30.

⁹⁰ Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood*, 29.

⁹¹ Cesar Birzea, “European citizenship as a cultural and political construct,” *Journal of Social Science Education* 3, Special edition - European year of citizenship through education (2005): 29.

citizenship emphasises duties, powers and responsibilities and civic participation.⁹² The main emphasis of active citizenship is to encourage citizens to participate in civil society, which in turn shall lead to increased support for the European integration process.⁹³ Consequently, active citizenship represents the shift of perceiving citizenship not only as a status but also as a social practice.

European citizenship

The concept of a European citizenship was formally introduced and legally set down through the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. However, it was only ratified in 1993 after ratification in national parliaments and referenda in France, Ireland and Denmark (that had to vote twice), which shows that it was a highly controversial issue. The main condition for obtaining the status of European citizenship is to have the nationality of one of the member states. The European citizenship, sometimes ridiculed as a “citizenship light”,⁹⁴ implies a series of rights and entitlements. One of the main rights is the freedom of movement, which allows not only for free movement of goods, but also free movement of people. Students can now easily move to another country and pursue part of their studies or complete a full degree at a university abroad.

Shore argues that European citizenship was invented as an instrument for instilling European consciousness among the masses.⁹⁵ The category of European citizenship was invented because EU citizens are needed to create Europe as a political Union and for overcoming the democratic deficit.⁹⁶ Europe has been criticised for its felt distance between European citizens the European institutions, which makes the democratic deficit to one of the most prominent arguments in discussions about European integration. The democratic deficit describes the lack of democracy and democratic legitimacy of the EU and its institutions. Citizens experience the EU as too remote, inaccessible and its decisions as insufficiently representative. EU integration is perceived as a mainly elite-driven process with only little support from the ‘normal’ European citizens.

⁹² Giovanni Moro, “*The ‘Lab’ of European Citizenship: Democratic Deficit, Governance Approach and Non-standard Citizenship*,” Paper presented at the International Institute of Sociology Congress - Krakow, July 11-15, 2001, 5, accessed March 29, 2013. <http://www.gioannimoro.info/documenti/g.moro%20krakow%2001.pdf>

⁹³ Biesta, *What kind of citizenship for European higher education*, 148.

⁹⁴ Thomas Faist, “Social Citizenship in the European Union: Nested Membership,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 39,1 (2001): 39.

⁹⁵ Shore, *Building Europe*, 77.

⁹⁶ Bee, *Institutionally constructed European identity*, 444.

In the past years a decrease of support for the EU has also become visible in the low and decreasing turnout in European Parliament elections. When in the first European elections 1979 still 63% of the European citizens wanted to have a say in European politics, in 2009 only 43% of the electorate voted and six member states even showed a turnout below 30%.⁹⁷ However, it should be noted that at the same time in many member states the participation in general elections has also been decreasing.⁹⁸ In order to fight the lack of legitimacy, the EU aims to involve European citizens in the EU integration process for example through the recently started European Citizens' Initiative.⁹⁹ In addition, the year 2013 has been declared as the European Year of Citizens and aims to raise awareness about the rights of European citizens and to engage Europeans to participate in the EU's democratic life.¹⁰⁰

The legal category of European citizenship laid down in the Maastricht treaty focuses exclusively on rights and entitlements without outlining any duties or responsibilities.¹⁰¹ I argue that some of those responsibilities and duties of a European citizen, inherent in the new category of active (European) citizenship, are implied in the EU discourse on higher education which will be uncovered in the forthcoming analysis.

Neoliberalism and higher education

Through the analysis of official EU documents and promotional material on higher education and the reading of scholarly literature, it became clear that the EU higher education discourse is strongly linked to neoliberalism. The subsequent section will give a short account of neoliberalism, briefly outlining what it means and how it is connected to higher education. Furthermore, I will introduce some neoliberal key themes that emerged out of the analysis of the EU discourse and the scholarly literature on recent developments in higher education. These key themes will set the background for the analysis of the EU

⁹⁷ EP Turnout, "*Turnout at the European elections 1979-2009*," accessed February 17, 2013. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/000cdcd9d4/Turnout-\(1979-2009\).html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/000cdcd9d4/Turnout-(1979-2009).html)

⁹⁸ Eurostat Elections, "Voter turnout in national and EU parliamentary elections," accessed March 25, 2013. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/dataset?p_product_code=TSDGO310

⁹⁹ The Lisbon Treaty introduced the right for all European citizens to directly participate in or influence the EU decision-making process. Since 2012 the European Citizens' Initiative allows one million citizens from at least one quarter of the EU member states (at least 7 from 27) to forward proposals to the European Commission (on issues such as data protection, environmental issues, etc.).

¹⁰⁰ Europa Citizenship, "*European Year of Citizens 2013*," accessed April 4, 2013. <http://europa.eu/citizens-2013/en>

¹⁰¹ Shore, *Building Europe*, 77.

discourse on higher education and its relation to the construction of a European identity and citizenship.

Scholars agree that neoliberalism has become the dominant paradigm in the EU over the past decades.¹⁰² Harvey describes neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practices suggesting that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade”.¹⁰³ As described in the quote by Harvey, neoliberalism is usually associated with economic policy, which means, that the main focus is about establishing stable frameworks in which capital accumulation can continue.¹⁰⁴ Giroux suggests that neoliberalism is also “a political philosophy and ideology that affects every dimension of social life”, which helps to explain that it has entered and become hegemonic in the discourse on higher education.¹⁰⁵

How is neoliberalism linked to education then? In the past years higher education in Europe has been subject to profound changes. Dynamics such as demographic developments, sluggish economic growth and increased global competition through globalisation resulted in an array of reforms to higher education systems.¹⁰⁶ Along with those developments a neoliberal political rationality in higher education has become hegemonic in many parts of the world. Since the 1980s the EU has increasingly adopted a neoliberal agenda with regards to its politics in higher education.¹⁰⁷ Taking a neoliberal perspective on education, the interest of the EU in higher education policy can be explained based on the role that higher education plays for the development of a well-developed and open labour market. Education is seen as a set of skills to be acquired in institutions that shall increase the possibility of getting a ‘better’ job. In this line, education is increasingly understood as an economic commodity to be used to foster European’s employability and to improve the quality of the workforce that will produce wealth and

¹⁰² Katharyne Mitchell, “Neoliberal Governmentality in the European Union: education, training, and technologies of citizenship,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24,3 (2006): 393.

¹⁰³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, *Neoliberal Governmentality*, 393.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism. Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*. (Boulder CO and London: Paradigm Press, 2004), 52. Quoted in: Clar Doyle and Amarjit Singh, *Reading and Teaching - Henry Giroux* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 51.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Dobbins, Christoph Knill and Eva Maria Vögtle, “An analytical framework for the cross- country comparison of higher education governance,” *Higher Education* 62,5 (2011): 665.

¹⁰⁷ Peo Hansen, “European Citizenship, or Where Neoliberalism Meets Ethno-Culturalism: Analysing the European Union’s citizenship discourse,” *European Societies* 2,2 (2000): 141.

will finally lead into competitive advantage.¹⁰⁸ Walkenhorst speaks of a “functional-economic turn” in education policy and describes education as an additional market and a tool to create workforce.¹⁰⁹

Neoliberal key themes

Subsequently I present some general themes of neoliberalism, which will come up again in the analysis of the EU discourse on higher education. These themes are: competition, employability, marketization, quality, the knowledge economy and a market-oriented perception of the individual. The concept of competition is a key theme and has been described to be a primary virtue among neoliberals.¹¹⁰ Competition in higher education is described as a means to increase the responsiveness of the universities to the market order, to increase productivity, to improve quality and to strengthen the accountability to their customers, the students.¹¹¹ Furthermore, competition can be seen as a thread tying and linking a variety of neoliberal assumptions together:

- Europe has to invest in its knowledge-based economy to stay upfront in the competition with the wider world,
- quality improves the competitiveness of universities,
- through marketization universities compete between each other on the higher education market for students, and
- students have to invest in their education to stay competitive and to be (more) employable.

This means, that competition takes place on different levels: Europe competes for having the best education system, countries for having the best universities, universities for the most talented students and students among themselves for being the most successful students with the aim of making themselves more employable.

On the micro-level, advocates of a neoliberal agenda in higher education stress the market-oriented perception of the individual, in which the state seeks to create competitive and

¹⁰⁸ Vassiliki Papatsiba, “European Higher Education Policy and the Formation of Entrepreneurial Students,” *European Educational Research Journal* 8,2 (2009): 193.

¹⁰⁹ Heiko Walkenhorst, “Explaining Change in EU Education Policy,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 15,4 (2008): 569.

¹¹⁰ Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 64.

¹¹¹ Mark Olssen and Michael Peters, “Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism,” *Journal of Education Policy* 20,3 (2005): 326.

enterprising individuals.¹¹² Individuals are seen as self-determined and self-interested subjects, who are responsible and accountable for their own actions.¹¹³ That means, that individual success but also failure are seen as personal achievements or failings. Under neoliberalism, if a graduate does not succeed on the labour market, it is due to his/her own individual responsibility, because he/she has not invested enough in human capital in form of education and thus did not acquire sufficient skills and knowledge. Taking this view even further, the underlying message of individual competitiveness and responsibility can be said to be “that your problems are all your fault” and on the other hand “your privileges are all your own achievement”.¹¹⁴

Olssen and Peters describe the rise in the importance of knowledge as capital as the most significant change brought by neoliberalism.¹¹⁵ In the knowledge-based economy individuals are encouraged to improve their knowledge capital through education, with a rationale of training for employability. The purpose of education is primarily to improve the individuals’ employability and thus eventually leading into employment.

Employability is closely linked to the view of the individual as a responsible and accountable subject. Supporters of a neoliberal agenda argue that it is the personal responsibility of individuals to make sure that they have the right qualifications and skills to find the right employment (regardless the outer circumstances).¹¹⁶ Taking the neoliberal view on the individual responsibility even further, Overbeek presents unemployment as a personal defect of the unemployed, who is unable or unwilling to find a fitting job in the labour market.¹¹⁷

Another part of a neoliberal rationality in higher education is the phenomenon of marketization in higher education. Marketization is related to the adoption of customer-oriented thinking, emphasising the importance of quality assurance and competition.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Olssen and Peters, *Neoliberalism and Higher Education*, 315.

¹¹³ Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 65.

¹¹⁴ John Brennan and Rajani Naidoo, “Higher Education and the Achievement (and/or Prevention) of Equity and Social Justice,” *Higher Education* 56,3 (2008): 294.

¹¹⁵ Olssen and Peters, *Neoliberalism and Higher Education*, 330.

¹¹⁶ Henk Overbeek, “Globalization, neo-liberalism and the employment question,” in *The Political Economy of European Employment: European integration and the transnationalization of the (un)employment question*, ed. Henk Overbeek (London: Routledge 2003), 27.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁸ Jane V. Hemsley-Brown and Izhar Oplatka, “Market Orientation in Universities: A comparative study of two national higher education systems,” *International Journal of Educational Management* 24, 3 (2010): 204-220.

One concrete example of marketization is the introduction of tuition fees for university studies. Taking a market-oriented perspective, students can be regarded as customers who access universities to consume education and therefore demand value for their money. On the other hand, universities are increasingly forced to be operating as companies competing to sell their products to their customers.¹¹⁹ The introduction of tuition fees and marketization goes hand in hand with a greater competition between universities on national and international level and implies therefore a wider market choice for the customers, the students.

Related to marketization, offering the best education, quality is another important concept and tool of making universities more effective and competitive in the knowledge-based economy.¹²⁰ It is through high quality in education that universities are able to produce labour force that in return has the potential to contribute to Europe's competitiveness in the global market.

In the forthcoming analysis I will explore how these concepts and themes are embedded and used in the EU discourse on higher education.

Critiques and critical reflection on neoliberalism

The neoliberal developments in higher education have of course not occurred without criticism. Maybe one of the strongest opponents of neoliberalism is Giroux, who criticises that "higher education is viewed by the apostles of market fundamentalism as a space for producing profits, educating a docile labour force, and a powerful institution for indoctrinating students into accepting the obedience demanded by the corporate order."¹²¹

Personally, I do not support such a negative view on neoliberal elements in higher education. Subsequently I discuss two issues (the commodification of higher education and the view of the individual) to illustrate my opinion and show that there are always two ways of looking at things.

One of the main critiques of neoliberalism is that education is no longer regarded as a public good and fundamental right, but a product that can be bought by paying tuition

¹¹⁹ Fairclough, *Critical discourse analysis*, 143.

¹²⁰ Corbett, *Universities Europe of knowledge*, 4.

¹²¹ Truthout, "The Violence of Neoliberalism and the Attack on Higher Education: An interview with Henry A. Giroux by CJ Polychroniou," accessed April 10, 2013. <http://truth-out.org/news/item/15237-predatory-capitalism-and-the-attack-on-higher-education-an-interview-with-henry-a-giroux>

fees.¹²² The marketization of universities and in particular the introduction of high tuition fees has of course not occurred without its critiques. In many countries higher education institutions have been criticised for restricting access to education for students from working class backgrounds. In the past years student protests against high tuition fees have been a widespread phenomenon across Europe (e.g. in Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom and Hungary). For a complete picture, both sides and points of view to a problem should be considered. On one hand, if high tuition fees mean that education becomes something only available to those that have the money to pay for it, this development can indeed be perceived as negative. Furthermore, if neoliberalism means that students are reduced to consumers and passive recipients of knowledge, it is likely that it ignores their critical reflection and converts them into tools of the higher education machinery. However, viewing students as costumers might also bring along a qualitative increase of the education that is offered. At best, the customers (= students) are kings, their opinions will be taken into consideration and the offered education will be adapted to their needs.

Another major point at issue is the neoliberal perspective on individuals who shall be self-determined and competitive individuals. Entrepreneurial initiative and personal responsibility are rewarded, which to a certain extent seems to be positive: just as in the American dream, everybody who works hard has the possibility to make good money. In general, I would argue that these neoliberal attitudes are needed in the current times of crisis in order to overcome the crisis. Only active individuals (regardless their European identity feeling) will be capable to succeed. However, if this argumentation leads to view individual responsibility in the way that ‘all the problems are your faults’ and citizens are left without help from the social welfare system, it might indeed represent a negative development.

Analysis

Subsequently I present my findings of the analysis and give examples of citations as illustrations from the analysed official EU documents. First, I go through the construction

¹²² Peter Mayo, “Competitiveness, diversification and the international higher education cash flow: The EU’s higher education discourse amidst the challenges of globalisation,” *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 19,2 (2009): 88.

of a European identity and citizenship. Then I move on to discuss the EU discourse on higher education more generally and its links to the construction of a common European identity.

The construction of a European identity

According to constructivism, identity is a constructed entity. Identities, such as European identity, are socially constructed through discourses which shape the way individuals think and perceive the world. In the present analysis I aim to explore how the EU discourse on higher education forms and influences the behaviour and identities of the students, thus creating and shaping their European identity.

The constructive element of the European identity becomes clear in the following statement of the European Parliament: “One of the central objectives of YoM [Youth on the Move] is to strengthen European cohesion and *produce* citizens with an awareness of their European identity”¹²³ (my emphasis). By using the word ‘produce’ the identity formation resembles a rather simple production process of creating people who will feel European. This way, it disregards that students are still human beings with subjective emotions, feelings and identities, who might actually prefer to oppose identifying as European.

The present chapter aims at examining three aspects used by the EU to construct a European identity feeling. Firstly, by the use of symbols the EU attempts to make people feel more attached to Europe. The main assumption is that symbols, which are shared and commonly understood by Europeans, will make people feel emotionally connected to Europe and will function as a link between them. Secondly, the motto of ‘united in diversity’ emphasises Europe’s diversity, which is a central part of the European project. When Europeans acknowledge and appreciate Europe’s diversity they become more emotionally attached to Europe. And finally, by the awareness of sharing a common past, present and future, Europeans will sense a feeling of unity among them. All three aspects (symbols, diversity and shared past, present future) aim at making people feel more emotionally attached to Europe.

¹²³ European Parliament, “Report on Youth on the Move: - a framework for improving Europe's education and training systems,” Committee on Culture and Education, *A7-0169/2011* (April 20, 2011), 6.

... through symbols

An essential part of collective identities is its foundation on commonalities, in form of heritage, history, culture and language. With regards to a European identity, Smiths argues that there are no common European memories, myths and symbols, that are needed for the construction of identities: “Without shared memories and meanings, without common symbols and myths, without shrines and ceremonies and monuments, except the bitter reminders of recent holocausts and wars, who will feel European in the depths of their being, and who will willingly sacrifice themselves for so abstract an ideal? In short, who will die for Europe?”¹²⁴

Almost 20 years after Smith’s question I claim that, among others, there are symbols contained and created through the EU discourse on higher education. These symbols shall increase the visibility of EU activities and promote a European identity feeling among its population. Some of the best known European symbols that shall foster a European identity feeling are the flag, anthem and of course the European currency – the Euro. In the field of higher education I argue that ‘Erasmus’, the educational programme in itself can also be regarded as a symbol. The EU discourse promotes Erasmus as the EU’s best known and most popular of all European programmes.¹²⁵ In 26 years of existence Erasmus has become a symbol that is commonly understood and shared by the European citizens and students and with which they can identify. With a positive identification towards the Erasmus programme, it is hoped that they will also feel positive towards Europe.

According to the European Commission, the name ‘Erasmus’ is not only widely recognised as a synonym of EU educational mobility, but also for its “European values such as multiculturalism and multilingualism”.¹²⁶ By using the name of the philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam the EU makes reference to a common past and European

¹²⁴ Anthony Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 139.

¹²⁵ EU Publication, “Erasmus changing lives opening minds for 25 years,” (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011), 3, accessed February 1, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/manifesto_en.pdf

¹²⁶ European Commission. “Erasmus For All: The EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport”, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *COM(2011) 787 final* (Brussels, November 23, 2011), 4.

heritage.¹²⁷ In this sense Erasmus is used as a tool to make the individual aware of the European heritage of great philosophers.

In promotional material and brochures the Erasmus programme is represented with a logo showing a portrait of Erasmus, which in itself acts as a symbol. With the frequent use of the logo, the EU might attempt that one day the Erasmus symbol together with the name will be as established and well-known as the European flag. The power the EU ascribes to Erasmus can also be seen in the fact that the proposal for a name for the new European horizontal education programme is 'Erasmus for All'.

On the level of the individual who partakes in an Erasmus exchange semester abroad, the Erasmus programme serves as a kind of personal and educational status symbol representing the capacity to survive in a foreign environment.¹²⁸ Or as Delors puts it, the "children of Erasmus' learn to know each other better and understand the realities of countries other than their own."¹²⁹ The EU promotes a picture of Erasmus that has the power to enhance the students' perception of feeling as a European. So uses the EU in a publication to celebrate the Erasmus programme the quotation of a young Portuguese, who had been on an exchange semester at Lund University in Sweden: "When I finished my Erasmus programme I felt not only Portuguese; but a bit Swedish (after spending one of my 22 years in Sweden)... a little bit Italian as well, and Spanish, German, French and so on".¹³⁰ This quote shows that the Erasmus programme does not only make people feel closer to Europe, but it works as a link between Europeans. Students who have participated in Erasmus, feel connected and closer to other Erasmus students and Europeans in general. In the same line Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport states: "Erasmus has changed the lives of almost three million young people and opened the minds of the first genuinely European generation."¹³¹

¹²⁷ Bruter, *Citizens of Europe*, 89.

¹²⁸ Howard Davis, et al. "International Education in Life Course," in *The Evolution of European Identities: Biographical Approaches*, ed. Robert Miller and Graham Day (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51.

¹²⁹ EU Publication, *Erasmus 25 years*, 4.

¹³⁰ EU Publication, "ERASMUS. Success Stories. Europe Creates Opportunities," (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Commission, 2007), 4, accessed January 11, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/erasmus/success-stories_en.pdf

¹³¹ EU Publication, *Erasmus 25 years*, 3.

... symbols as agents of consciousness

The Erasmus programme can be associated to Shore's agents of consciousness, which are programmes and symbols aimed at raising awareness of the European project. Shore, who takes a critical stance towards the EU project, states that EU cultural policies have been employed by the EU elites of the European Commission to artificially create Europe and a European feeling among its citizens.¹³² In a top-down process, the EU elites have attempted to create a European consciousness and European culture over the heads of Europeans and European nations. A central role in this process is occupied by the work of so called 'agents of European consciousness', which are "all those actors, actions, artefacts, bodies, institutions, policies and representations which, singularly or collectively, help to engender awareness and promote acceptance of the 'European idea'".¹³³ An agent – for example in form of the Erasmus programme, Jean Monnet programme, European awards, European sport competitions or twin-towns – has influence on the way people perceive and experience Europe in relation to themselves. Shore suggests that those agents of consciousness are used as political instruments to tackle the democratic deficit, achieve political legitimacy and develop support for Europe within the population.

... through 'united in diversity'?

A central part of Europe is its cultural diversity. The EU uses the motto of 'united in diversity' (or 'unity in diversity') emphasizing a common European culture while acknowledging the diversity of the member states. Diversity refers to an internal perspective of Europe (citizenship, member states, languages, cultures and traditions) while united/unity is related to the political and territorial boundaries of the EU in opposition to the others.¹³⁴ The motto also serves as a tool to assure European citizens that a European identity will not replace a national, regional or local identity as German or regional as Cologne. Consequently the slogan of 'united in diversity' has become a popular

¹³² Shore, *Building Europe*, 26.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁴ Patrick Studer, "Conceptual contradiction and discourses on multilingualism," in *Linguistic Diversity in Europe: Current trends and discourses*, ed. Patrick Studer and Iwar Werlen (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 124.

way of thinking about European identity, especially in the context of the enlargement of the EU.¹³⁵

When analysing the EU discourse on higher education, it is notable that none of the documents explicitly uses the slogan of ‘unity/united in diversity’.¹³⁶ This could be seen as an indicator that the motto is not popular among the EU institutions. However, the EU discourse contains frequent references to diversity in terms of linguistic diversity and diversity in higher education, which subsequently will be further explored.

... *linguistic diversity in Europe*

Language is part of the analysed discourse on higher education in two ways. On the one hand the variety of spoken languages in Europe is referred to as Europe’s linguistic diversity, while on the other hand mastering foreign languages is seen as one of the basic skills of the European citizen.

Generally, languages can be seen as a symbol of belonging, in the sense that I feel that I belong to the group who speaks the same language(s) as I do. In this strict sense the idea of a European Union would not work, since EU citizens do not share a common language. With the latest EU enlargement the official languages of the European Union increased from 11 to 23. This diversity of languages has also been described as the greatest barrier to a further European integration.¹³⁷ Being aware of this problem, the EU discourse stresses the linguistic diversity of Europe: “linguistic and cultural diversity is part and parcel of the European identity; it is at once a shared heritage, a wealth, a challenge and an asset for Europe”.¹³⁸ The European linguistic diversity finds also expression in the right that all European citizens may use their mother tongue when they communicate with the EU institutions (being one of the fundamental rights of being EU citizen). Even though this right might seem exclusively positive at first sight, it has been criticised because of the additional administrative burden it represents for the administrative structure of the European institutions.

¹³⁵ Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 63.

¹³⁶ The motto ‘united in diversity’ only appears in the footer in reports issued by the European Parliament.

¹³⁷ Shore, *Building Europe*, 229.

¹³⁸ Council of the European Union, “Council Resolution on a European strategy for multilingualism,” (2905th Education, Youth and Culture Council Meeting 21 November 2008), 2, accessed February 15, 2013. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104230.pdf

Another part of the discourse on linguistic diversity is the concept of multilingualism. “Multilingualism is not only part of the European heritage but also a chance to develop a society which is open, respectful of cultural diversity and ready for cooperation.”¹³⁹ According to Studer the term multilingualism integrated several already existing discourses under one umbrella: the concept of linguistic diversity, language learning which enables the mutual understanding of European citizens, and a neoliberal rationale of European competitiveness laid down in the acknowledgement of language diversity as a source of wealth.¹⁴⁰ The neoliberal rationale, promoting an individual that should master foreign languages, will be further explored in the forthcoming analysis.

... and diversity in higher education

Europe’s diversity is not only emphasised in cultural and linguistic terms. Also the higher education area contains characteristics of diversity, which are acknowledged and promoted in the EU discourse. The EU does not attempt to create a homogenous area of higher education but, on the contrary, it promotes its diversity. The European Parliament “[a]cknowledges the richness inherent in the wide variety of higher education institutions in Europe”¹⁴¹ and the European Commission stresses that “[t]here is no single excellence model: Europe needs a wide diversity of higher education institutions, and each must pursue excellence in line with its mission and strategic priorities.”¹⁴² Even though the Bologna process aims to streamline the degree structures and create a European Higher Education Area, the EU stresses the need “to maintain the diversity of educational pathways and programmes, teaching methods and university systems in the EU”.¹⁴³ The motto of unity in diversity can therefore also be applied to European higher education: creating and working towards ‘unity’ in terms of structure (creating a European Higher Education Area with streamlined degrees), while Europe’s ‘diversity’ is emphasized with regards to the content of education and variety of institutions.

¹³⁹ Council of the European Union, “Council conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility,” *Official Journal of the European Union* 2011/C 372/07 (December 20, 2011), 28.

¹⁴⁰ Studer, *Discourses on multilingualism*, 124.

¹⁴¹ European Parliament, “Report on modernising Europe’s higher education systems,” Committee on Culture and Education, *A7-0057/2012* (March 12, 2012), 12.

¹⁴² European Commission, “Supporting growth and jobs - an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems,” Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *COM(2011) 567 final* (September 20, 2011), 2.

¹⁴³ European Parliament, *Modernising Europe’s higher education*, 12.

... through linking past, present and future

An important constituent part of a collective identity is that it is based on commonalities in form of a shared past, present and future. A major characteristic for a collective identity to emerge is to be based upon a common history and heritage. In the case of Europe that went through a history of war and struggles, at first sight it might not be that easy to find a common past which is able to bind the European population together. In the analysed documents the only direct reference to the past is made in form of common heritage “the university is a major aspect of European heritage created more than 800 years ago”.¹⁴⁴ But generally, the EU discourse tries to achieve the support of the Europeans for its project by emphasizing the present situation and strengths of Europe:

“Europe has many strengths: we can count on the talent and creativity of our people, a strong industrial base, (...) our position as the world's biggest trading bloc and leading destination for foreign direct investment. But we can also count on our strong values, democratic institutions, our consideration for economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity, our respect for the environment, our cultural diversity, respect for gender equality – just to name a few.”¹⁴⁵

A further communality is created through appeals to a common future and destiny. In the analysed documents the future is mostly addressed in the context of overcoming the current economic crisis. “Education and training are now more important than ever for innovation, productivity and growth, especially in the context of the current economic and financial crisis”.¹⁴⁶ European identity and the promotion of mobility are presented as a solution to overcome the crisis. “There will be no sustainable solution to the crisis without a manifest pledge to achieve both excellence and equity through education, promote mobility and shape a European identity based on the multiculturalism and diversity that characterises the European model.”¹⁴⁷ This statement could be interpreted in a way that

¹⁴⁴ European Parliament, “Report on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process,” Committee on Culture and Education, *A7-0035/2012* (February 9, 2012), 6.

¹⁴⁵ European Commission, “Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Communication from the Commission,” *COM(2010) 2020 final* (Brussels, March 3, 2010), 9.

¹⁴⁶ European Commission, *Erasmus For All Communication*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

people are actually obliged to feel European and be mobile to be able to overcome the crisis.

The present economic crisis presents a critical moment for a European identity feeling. Usually, situations of crisis and turbulence are said to affect and weaken established ties of social cohesion.¹⁴⁸ And certainly, the current financial crisis has put the bonds of European solidarity to the test. On the one hand, a crisis has the potential to bind people together, when they realise that only together they are able face the common threat. But on the other hand, in the context of the current crisis, some Southern-European countries witness protests against austerity measures and others feel that they have to carry the whole burden of the European project. This created a situation that revived feelings of national identification.¹⁴⁹ The current situation of instability, I argue, explains why it is even more important for the EU to increase their efforts to promote a European identity. One way to do this is through the EU discourse on higher education.

Summing up, I have presented how the Erasmus programme as a common symbol, the European diversity, and the shared past, present and future lay the foundation for a European identity feeling. These cultural aspects are needed as a basis on top of which the EU can construct a European citizen and the notion of an active European citizenship.

The construction of a European citizen(ship)

In the context of the 2013 European year of citizens, European citizenship has been highlighted as the cornerstone of European integration. The subsequent section outlines how the EU discourse constructs this (active) European citizenship, who is included and who is excluded from it, and the rights and obligations it implies.

Construction of an active European citizenship

I have argued earlier that by creating the category of European citizenship the EU wants to encourage Europeans to support the EU and to promote active democratic participation.

In quantitative terms the analysed EU documents include significantly more references to 'European citizen' or '(active) citizenship', than to 'European identity'. I see this emphasis on a European citizenship (instead of identity) as linked to the decline Europe witnessed in

¹⁴⁸ Stråth, *A European Identity: To the Historical Limits of a Concept*, 387.

¹⁴⁹ Fligstein, Polyakova, and Sandholtz, *European Integration, Nationalism and European Identity*, 108.

participation in democratic life. Therefore I argue that the EU discourse on higher education tries to foster democratic participation by encouraging citizens to be active. So states for example the European Parliament: “higher education is a public good that fosters culture, diversity, democratic values and personal development and prepares students to become active citizens who will support European cohesion”.¹⁵⁰ Or as the European Commission puts it “[t]he broad mission of education and training encompasses objectives such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being”.¹⁵¹

Participating in mobility is one of the ways emphasised by the EU discourse to create these active European citizens and more democratic participation. Mobility “contributes to a sense of European citizenship and involvement in democratic processes”¹⁵² and has the potential to “reinforce participation of young people in democratic life”.¹⁵³ Furthermore, it is one of the ways in which citizens can “participate actively in society”.¹⁵⁴

An interesting observation is that in the final report of the European Parliament on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions the potential of mobility has been reduced, stating that “educational exchanges can *potentially* strengthen civil society, foster democratisation and good governance, encourage the development of skills, promote human rights and fundamental freedom and provide building blocks for lasting cooperation”¹⁵⁵ (my emphasis). The word ‘potentially’ was not used in the draft version but only included in the final version of the report.¹⁵⁶ This might indicate that the potential of mobility and what it can imply with regards to the characteristics of an active citizenship are still contested.

Another indicator that European citizenship is an important concept in the EU discourse is reflected in the wish of the European Parliament “to open a more fundamental debate

¹⁵⁰ European Parliament, *Modernising Europe's higher education*, 8.

¹⁵¹ European Commission, “Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for better socio-economic outcomes,” Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *COM(2012) 669 final* (Strasbourg, November 20, 2012), 2.

¹⁵² European Parliament, *Report on Youth on the Move*, 5.

¹⁵³ European Commission, *Erasmus For All Communication*, 6.

¹⁵⁴ Council of the European Union, *Conclusions on language competences*, 28.

¹⁵⁵ European Parliament, “Report on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions,” Committee on Culture and Education, *A7-0112/2011* (March 31, 2011), 6.

¹⁵⁶ European Parliament, “Draft Report on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions,” Committee on Culture and Education, *2010/2161(INI)* (Brussels, November 29, 2010): 5.

about the citizenship dimension of the Union's activities".¹⁵⁷ These discussions on the different dimensions of European citizenship have been taken up and are followed in the context of the 2013 European Year of Citizens, including an EU Citizenship Report that has been adopted in May 2013.

The Erasmus programme takes an important position in the EU discourse on European citizenship. In the context of the 25th anniversary of the Erasmus programme Delors acknowledges "[t]he undeniable success of the Erasmus programme [that] has made a crucial contribution to creating the 'Europe of citizens' we strive for – and for which so much remains to be done".¹⁵⁸ These active European citizens are expected to use their rights and skills and act in forms that will benefit not only the individual but also the society. A particular notion of a kind of active citizenship, namely the active learning, foreign language speaking, flexible and employable citizen, will be further explored in relation to the promotion of a European citizen with certain characteristics and traits.

Who is in and who is out?

One layer of constructing a European citizen is its definition on the basis of inclusion and exclusion from the EU and European citizenship. The legal status of being a European citizen is conferred on the basis of having the nationality of one of the member states, and is therefore ascribed an exclusionary status.

Hansen draws attention to the fact that rights and opportunities related to EU citizenship mostly address certain elite groups and not the whole of all European people.¹⁵⁹ This view is also supported by Kuhn, who argues that educational exchange programmes (such as Erasmus) have missed their mark in terms of promoting a European identity.¹⁶⁰ Not only because they address students who are already very likely to feel European, but also by only addressing highly educated individuals, and in this sense excluding low-educated individuals who do not have the opportunities to partake in educational exchanges. Recent statistics confirm that in most European countries educational mobility is socially

¹⁵⁷ European Parliament, "Erasmus For All (2014-2020). Executive Summary," Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Culture and Education, *PE 474.543* (April 2012), 6.

¹⁵⁸ EU Publication, *Erasmus 25 years*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Hansen, *European Citizenship, or Where Neoliberalism Meets Ethno-Culturalism*, 151.

¹⁶⁰ Theresa Kuhn, "Why Educational Exchange Programmes Miss their Mark: Cross-border Mobility, Education and European Identity," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50,6 (2012): 994-1010.

selective. Due to obstacles such as financial insecurities and language competencies the numbers of participants from low social backgrounds are lower than from their peer groups.¹⁶¹

Education and mobility as fundamental rights or obligations?

Two of the bestowed rights of being a European citizen, are the right to education and the fundamental right to free movement.¹⁶² These rights have not been created in an altruistic manner. Rather it is hoped that if people see and use the benefits of being a European citizen, they will identify with Europe's goals and vision and be supportive to the European project.

The European Parliament highlights "that every student enrolled in a European university has the right to quality education, to graduate and to see his qualification recognised in any EU country".¹⁶³ Throughout the analysed documents higher education is presented as something positive. I argue that by emphasising the many positive aspects education brings, it is implicitly said that education is not only a right for all European citizens, but a necessity for Europe's future: Higher education "plays a crucial role in individual and societal advancement, and in providing the highly skilled human capital and the articulate citizens that Europe needs to create jobs, economic growth and prosperity".¹⁶⁴

The right to education is closely linked to the recognition of qualifications, which enables the mobility of students and workers. The right to be mobile across national borders (for the purpose of work or studying) is another of the fundamental freedoms, which the EU grants to its citizens and that is actively promoted in the EU discourse. By taking advantage of the rights, which are bestowed to European citizens, I argue, it is hoped that individuals will feel more positive regarding the European integration process.

Though, the current mobility levels within Europe are still very low with an average of only slightly more than 2% of EU citizens who at the moment live in another EU member state. Only 10% of Europeans have lived and worked abroad (in EU and/or non EU

¹⁶¹ Nicolai Netz, Dominic Orr, Christoph Gwosd and Björn Huß, "What deters students from studying abroad? Evidence from Austria, Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands and Poland," *HIS: Discussion Paper* (2012), 165.

¹⁶² EU, "Charter Of Fundamental Rights Of The European Union," *Official Journal of the European Communities* C 364, 2000: 11, 19.

¹⁶³ European Parliament, *Report on contribution to Bologna Process*, 7.

¹⁶⁴ European Commission, *Supporting growth and jobs*, 2.

countries) at some point in their life.¹⁶⁵ These numbers show that so far the European Union has not been very successful in promoting the idea of living and working abroad.

In order to increase these numbers, the EU has spotted mobility at university level as one of the ways to prepare citizens to become mobile workers later in their life. “Learning mobility also benefits the EU as a whole; (...) it contributes to the internal market, as Europeans who are mobile as young learners are more likely to be mobile as workers later in life.”¹⁶⁶ The underlying expectation is that experience abroad does not only foster students’ knowledge, competences and personal development, but shall help to encourage European citizens to be mobile throughout their lifetime, which is a central part of the European project.¹⁶⁷

Similar to the right to education, in the official EU discourse mobility is not only presented as a fundamental right of the European citizen, but as I see it, increasingly as a duty or obligation. So states the European Commission: “mobility should become a natural feature of being European and an opportunity open to all young people in Europe”.¹⁶⁸ A responsible European citizen must therefore participate in mobility and consequently, mobility becomes the norm.¹⁶⁹ It is widely promoted in the EU discourse that mobility can help to “foster a deepened sense of European identity and citizenship among young people”.¹⁷⁰ And taking the argumentation even further, if partaking in mobility is a way to obtain European citizenship and identity, other students who have not been mobile are first off excluded and have to gain this status in a different way. It could be said, that they have to become active (learning) citizens or similar in order to gain the status of European citizenship and identity.

With taking advantage of the rights bestowed to European citizens, the EU does not only attempt that European’s will become more supportive to Europe. As I showed, the

¹⁶⁵ Eurobarometer Mobility, “Geographical and labour market mobility,” Eurobarometer Special June 2010, accessed March 29, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_337_en.pdf

¹⁶⁶ EU Publication, “Your rights as a mobile student. A guide to the rights of mobile students in the European Union,” (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011), 5. Accessed December 10, 2012. http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/higher/move_en.pdf

¹⁶⁷ The aspect of being mobile throughout lifetime is sometimes contested as it is seen at odds with traditional family values that imply a stable location and because of the implications of mobility for family structures and relations (see also final discussion in this thesis).

¹⁶⁸ European Commission, “Green Paper. Promoting the learning mobility of young people,” *COM(2009) 329 final* (Brussels, July 8, 2009), 3.

¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the number of study programmes that foresee a mandatory mobility period abroad is increasing (for example programmes in linguistics or programmes with international or European focus).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

emphasis has increasingly shifted towards duties and responsibilities, in which it becomes an obligation to enrol in higher education and to be mobile in order to count as a (responsible) European citizen.

Higher education and mobility in neoliberal times

In the following section I will analyse the EU discourse on higher education with a particular focus on neoliberal ideologies. First I will discuss the concept of competition and then move on to analyse how mobility acts a tool to foster employability, quality, flexibility and internationalisation. In particular, I will look closer at how the EU discourse refers to and uses those concepts and how they are linked to the construction of a common European identity. Finally, I will outline how the discourse aims to shape the characteristics and traits a (responsible) European citizen should have.

Competition and competitiveness

As outlined before, competition can be seen as a thread tying and linking a variety of concepts. In the context of a global economy the concept of competitiveness has been highlighted to be at the centre of the EU discourse in higher education.¹⁷¹ So was for example the main aim of the Lisbon strategy to make Europe by 2010 the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. Even after 2010 I argue that competition is still one of the most important aspects in the EU discourse on higher education. In the following section I will examine more closely the different facets that the concept of competition implies and means in the area of higher education.

As described previously competition takes place at different levels: the macro, institutional, and individual level. At macro-level the EU aims to create a competitive Europe, which represents a somewhat paradoxical situation where the member states are bound together through competition.¹⁷² European member states need to cooperate and at the same time compete with each other in order to improve their performance and create the unity that is needed so that Europe as a whole will be able to compete worldwide.

¹⁷¹ Mayo, *Competitiveness, diversification and globalisation*, 93.

¹⁷² Isabelle Bruno, "The 'Indefinite Discipline' of Competitiveness: Benchmarking as a Neoliberal Technology of Government," *Minerva* 47,3 (2009): 272.

At the institutional level, in a context of increasing global competition in the higher education market, universities court and compete worldwide for the most talented students. Corbett compares the market of higher education institutions with the international league of football teams. Some countries have it relatively easy when they compete with teams like Real Madrid, Manchester United or Bayern München for the best players, while other countries are only playing in the second or third league.¹⁷³ With university rankings (e.g. the Academic Ranking of World Universities by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University) universities have become increasingly worried about their market reputation. The EU discourse shares and fosters this preoccupation stating that “[a]ccording to the Shanghai index, only two European universities are in the world's top 20”.¹⁷⁴

Another aspect of competition promoted through the EU discourse is taking place at the individual level. According to the Council of the European Union “mobility contributes to both the personal and professional development of young people and enhances employability and competitiveness”.¹⁷⁵ Competition starts already long before the mobility period, when students try to secure the best education at the universities with the best status and reputation.¹⁷⁶ The competition continues when students envisage enrolling on an exchange semester abroad and compete for the most attractive Erasmus or mobility placements. For many students a study semester at a prestigious university in the United Kingdom or in a popular city as, for example, Barcelona might be more appealing than to spend an Erasmus term in a provincial town somewhere in Eastern Europe. Once students have been successful in the competition for the most wanted study placements, the competition continues on the job market for the best employment opportunities. For many professions, a study semester abroad is no longer seen as a particular asset for a candidate, but a requirement in order to be able to enter the competition for employment.

¹⁷³ Ann Corbett, *Universities and the Europe of knowledge: ideas, institutions and policy entrepreneurship in European Community higher education policy, 1955-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4.

¹⁷⁴ European Commission, *Europe 2020*, 12.

¹⁷⁵ Council of the European Union. Council Conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility. *Official Journal of the European Union* 2011/C 372/08 (December 20, 2011), 32.

¹⁷⁶ Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 31.

Competing against the 'others'...

The concept of the 'other' is not only important in the context of identity construction (against whom can a collective construct and define their identity) but also in a competition (against whom does a collective compete).

In the EU discourse on higher education, the 'others' in the worldwide competition are the United States (US) and Japan. "[T]he EU *as a whole* needs to attract the best students and researchers if it is to compete with the US."¹⁷⁷ In the competition for the most successful education system the direction of flows of student mobility has become a significant indicator. The US continues to hold the leading world position in attracting the biggest share of international students, whereas the United Kingdom (followed by Germany and France) has become the most popular destination for students who decided to study in Europe.¹⁷⁸ The analysed documents include several comparisons with the two main competitors, the US and Japan. For example in Europe "[l]ess than one person in three aged 25-34 has a university degree compared to 40% in the US and over 50% in Japan".¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, "[t]he EU still lags behind in the share of researchers in the total labour force: 6 per 100, compared to 9 in the US and 11 in Japan".¹⁸⁰ By giving these examples the EU attempts to motivate the member states to increase efforts in order to improve Europe's position with the biggest worldwide competitors. Both examples are of pure quantitative nature. However, an increased number of higher education degrees per capita might not necessarily mean a better employment situation and improvement in terms of competitiveness for Europe as a whole. Taking a more critical stance, a focus on quantity might actually decrease the potential for better quality. I claim that this is one of the reasons why the EU discourse emphasises and highlights the importance of high quality education (see forthcoming analysis).

¹⁷⁷ EU Publication, "The EU and the Bologna Process - shared goals, shared commitments. Supporting growth and jobs - An agenda for modernisation of Europe's higher education systems," (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012), 13, accessed January 11, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna-goals_en.pdf

¹⁷⁸ OECD, "Foreign/international students enrolled," accessed March 11, 2013. <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=RFOREIGN>

¹⁷⁹ European Commission, *Europe 2020*, 12.

¹⁸⁰ European Commission, *Supporting growth and jobs*, 2.

... vs. attracting the 'others'

While the EU tries to encourage the competitiveness of Europe as a whole to be able to compete against the 'others', the EU also pursues to attract the 'others'. So are the 'others' not only the main competitors as identified above, the US and Japan, but I claim, also non-European students who come to Europe to pursue a degree or an exchange semester. The European Commission states, that "attracting young people to Europe from third countries is an important element of future European competitiveness".¹⁸¹ Students from outside Europe are not only regarded as important to increase the competitiveness of Europe in the international market, but as Mayo points out, also to provide the capital (in forms of tuition fees) needed by European universities in order to compete with their counterparts in the US.¹⁸² In many European countries the tuition fees charged for non-European students are considerably higher than for national or European students (for example Lund University charges between 10 000 and 15 000 Euros from non-European students for a Masters degree whereas education is free for EU citizens). Except for a few cases most higher education institutions in Europe set tuition fees for international students by themselves.¹⁸³ With this legal background, universities are free to actively attract foreign students for reasons of income generation.

Another way of attracting the 'others' is through the award of scholarships to non-European nationals (often part of the internationalisation strategy of higher education institutions). As stated in the analysed documents, awarding scholarships is not only "[a]nother way of boosting Europe's attractiveness"¹⁸⁴ but as Knight and de Wit point out it is also related to the economic rationale of internationalisation – investing in future economic relations.¹⁸⁵ The Erasmus Mundus programme (competing with the US Fulbright programme) awards scholarships to students and staff from non-European countries to enrol on an exchange semester or study for a full degree at a European university. The success of this programme can be read in the numbers for the Erasmus Mundus Master

¹⁸¹ European Commission, *Green Paper learning mobility*, 10.

¹⁸² Mayo, *Competitiveness, diversification and globalisation*, 97.

¹⁸³ Eurydice Fees, "National student fee and support systems 2011/2012," accessed April 4, 2013. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/fees_and_support.pdf

¹⁸⁴ eFocus Education website, "Europe delivers: Promoting Europe as a centre of higher education excellence," eFocus Education February 2013, accessed April 11, 2013. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/e-focus_newsletter/2013/february/europe_deliver_en.php

¹⁸⁵ Knight, Jane and Hans de Wit, "Strategies for internationalisation of higher education: Historical and conceptual perspectives," in *Strategies for internationalisation of higher education*, ed. Hans de Wit (Amsterdam: European Association for International Education Publications, 1995), 10.

programme starting in 2004 with only 140 scholarships, to a total of 1 033 scholarships and 26 822 received applications from 162 countries in the academic year 2011/12.¹⁸⁶ The total budget for the Erasmus Mundus programme for the period of 2009-2013 was 950 million Euros (compared to 3.1 billion Euros for the period 2007-13 of the Erasmus programme) and is planned to be further increased with the new Erasmus for All programme.¹⁸⁷

The motivation for the EU to offer scholarships for both non-European and European students is the hope that those talented students will one day become the future elite of decision-makers in their home countries and will then remember with gratitude not only the host country, but also the donor of the scholarship.¹⁸⁸ This is also reflected in the following quote of a European student who received funding for an exchange semester: “It’s been a wonderful experience and I remain very grateful to the people who made it possible.”¹⁸⁹ Whereas European students shall become more supportive of the European project and develop a European identity, non-European students are important for future economic relations between their home country and Europe.

Mobility as a tool ...

As mentioned before, for this academic work I analysed documents dealing with higher education whereas I especially focused on documents that touched upon mobility. With this in mind, other aspects and discussions in the area of higher education might have come short.¹⁹⁰ However, I claim that mobility does actually represent an essential part in the EU discourse on higher education, especially in relation to a neoliberal ideology. The following quote on the benefits of mobility illustrates the wide range of potential influence mobility has been ascribed to:

¹⁸⁶ Erasmus Mundus Statistics, “*Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses – category A scholarships*,” accessed April 11, 2013. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/results_compendia/documents/statistics/emmc_2012_cat_a.pdf

¹⁸⁷ Erasmus Mundus, “Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (2009-2013),” Final Report, March 9, 2012, Public Policy and Management Institute, 10, accessed April 29, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2012/mundus_en.pdf

¹⁸⁸ Knight and de Wit, *Strategies for internationalization of higher education*, 10.

¹⁸⁹ EU Publication, “Erasmus: I am one of the two million who did it!” (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009), 13, accessed April 5, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/erasmus/2million_en.pdf

¹⁹⁰ For example the role of higher education institutions in the promotion of mobility and its implications for a European identity.

“Learning mobility is widely considered to contribute to enhancing the employability of young people through the acquisition of key skills and competences, including especially language competences and intercultural understanding, but also social and civic skills, entrepreneurship, problem-solving skills and creativity in general. In addition to providing valuable experience for the individuals concerned, learning mobility can help to improve the overall quality of education, especially through closer cooperation between educational institutions. Furthermore, it can help to reinforce a sense of European identity and citizenship.”¹⁹¹

By mentioning the impact on a European identity and citizenship only in the final sentence, it shows that this is a topic, which takes only a small part in the EU higher education discourse. Through the fact of including the concepts of EU identity and citizenship in one separate sentence, introduced by ‘furthermore’, it seems like they were simply added as a kind of relic from ancient times.

The quote also indicates that mobility has impact on different levels: on the individual level, the mobile student, and on the institutional level, the higher education institutions. Subsequently I will outline how mobility has influence on higher education institutions, as a means to increase quality, as a tool of internationalisation, and by fostering competition between universities. Furthermore, I will explore how the EU discourse on higher education promotes certain characteristics, and in how far these contribute to the shaping of a responsible European citizen.

... to foster competition

In the competitiveness discourse, mobility is seen as an instrument for strengthening the position of European higher education in the global knowledge economy. Furthermore, mobility is employed as a tool to foster competition between universities. “[M]obility (...) strengthens the academic and cultural internationalization of European higher education (...) and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions”.¹⁹² Universities compete to be among the most popular destinations for

¹⁹¹ Council of the European Union. *Council Conclusions on a benchmark for learning mobility*, 32.

¹⁹² EHEA, “The Bologna Process 2010 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade,” Communiqué of the Conference of European ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and

international and European exchange and degree students. The European Commission publishes different kinds of ranking lists, such as the top sending and receiving universities of Erasmus students. In 2007 and 2009 the European Commission also awarded the Lifelong Learning Erasmus Prize for Student Mobility to the universities receiving the highest number of incoming Erasmus students. Furthermore, brochures showing best practices shall inspire and encourage other universities to improve their performance. Through the deployment of tools, such as tables, ranking lists, prizes and the promotion of best practices, the EU fosters a competitive mentality among higher education institutions and aims to transform higher education in a community of self-improvement.

With the increasing emphasis on competition expressed for example through ranking lists,¹⁹³ institutions are investing in creating an international reputation and developing a name brand (branding) for their own institution to place them in a competitive and advantageous position in the higher education market.¹⁹⁴ This is also fostered in the EU discourse in the context of preparing a European strategy for the internationalisation of higher education, where “strengthening the international branding of EU universities” is presented as a solution in the scenario of increasing competition from Europe’s competitors.¹⁹⁵

... to increase quality

Quality is an important aspect in creating the competitive Europe the EU is striving for. “High quality education and training systems which are both efficient and equitable are

Louvain-la-Neuve (28-29 April 2009), 4, accessed December 12, 2012. http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/leuven_louvain-la-neuve_communique_april_2009.pdf

¹⁹³ Here it should be noted that university rankings are highly debated. While highly ranked universities have to increase their efforts to maintain their leading positions, an unwanted consequence is that weaker universities may have to re-justify their profile or that the invested time (in collecting and using data and statistics to improve their performance in the rankings) prevents progress in other areas. Furthermore, the choice of indicators and weights assigned to rankings is disputed. For a detailed overview on the discussion on rankings see: Andrejs Rauhvagers, “Global University Rankings and their impact,” EUA Report on Rankings 2011, accessed April 23, 2013. http://www.eua.be/pubs/Global_University_Rankings_and_Their_Impact.pdf

¹⁹⁴ Jane Knight, “Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales,” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8,1 (2004): 21.

¹⁹⁵ European Commission, “Roadmap. Commission Communication on a strategy for the internationalisation of higher education,” October 2011, 5, accessed April 11, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/planned_ia/docs/2012_eac_019_internationalisation_higher_education_en.pdf

crucial for Europe's success and for enhancing employability.”¹⁹⁶ Investing in high quality education is essential to achieve the Europe 2020 goals for growth, jobs and innovation¹⁹⁷. Only high quality standards in education will produce graduates with the necessary skills and qualifications who are expected to support Europe in becoming competitive in the global economy.

As described before, one form to achieve these high standards is through mobility of students and academic staff. “Mobility is essential to ensure high quality higher education”.¹⁹⁸ The main assumption is that cross-border contacts and exchanges have the potential to improve higher education in Europe. The mobility of students and staff brings new ideas and allows for the exchange of knowledge, which fosters innovation and new developments at the universities. At the same time institutions and academics are asked to adapt to their students’ needs (providing services such as language training, mentoring, etc.). In this way, mobility is a tool that can foster the quality of services of higher education institutions and the content of education.

Another way to achieve this high quality and optimisation of performance is through indicators or benchmarks. Benchmarks use the best European or worldwide performance as a yardstick against which the country, institution or individual shall judge one’s competitiveness.¹⁹⁹ In the EU discourse on higher education, the most relevant benchmark for this thesis (laid down in the Mobility Strategy of the Bologna Process and the EU 2020 Strategy) is that by 2020 at least 20% of higher education graduates in the EU should have had a period of higher education-related study or training abroad. The latest numbers show that the average of European students who enrol on a degree or exchange period in Europe reaches only slightly less than 4%,²⁰⁰ which means that much remains to be done to reach the envisaged benchmark.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ Council of the European Union, “Council conclusions on the employability of graduates from education and training,” 3164th Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, 10/11 May 2012, 4, accessed March 22, 2013. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/130142.pdf

¹⁹⁷ EU Publication, “Erasmus for All. Investing in Europe’s education, training and youth,” accessed December 15, 2012. http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/leaflet_en.pdf

¹⁹⁸ EHEA, “Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA),” EHEA Ministerial Conference Bucharest 2012, 1, accessed December 12, 2012. [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/\(1\)/2012%20EHEA%20Mobility%20Strategy.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/2012%20EHEA%20Mobility%20Strategy.pdf)

¹⁹⁹ Bruno, *Benchmarking Neoliberal Technology*, 273.

²⁰⁰ Eurydice, *Bologna Process Implementation Report*, 156.

²⁰¹ However, these numbers should be consumed with caution. A recent report from the European University Association (EUA) pointed out that international data collection is incomplete and inconsistent and outlined the current gaps that exist in data collection on mobility at European level and at many national levels. For

Some academics take a critical stance towards statistics and indicators and describe benchmarks and indicators as technologies of surveillance and control.²⁰² Others even question the effect of benchmarking, as for example Bruno who argues that “strictly speaking, nothing proves that benchmarking enhances the degree of ‘European competitiveness’”.²⁰³ Furthermore, benchmarking stands also for the shift in government methods in Europe and the neoliberal culture of governing at a distance.²⁰⁴

... for the internationalisation of higher education institutions

Internationalisation of higher education in Europe has become a core issue in discussions, debates and policies since the 1990s.²⁰⁵ The EU discourse promotes internationalisation as one of the key subjects and strategic goals for member states and higher education institutions.

The most common and frequently employed indicator for internationalisation is the rise of the proportion of foreign students at a university.²⁰⁶ Generally, short-term and degree mobility is ascribed the potential “to enhance the modernisation and internationalisation of education institutions”.²⁰⁷ In particular, the Erasmus programme is regarded as a major trigger for a qualitative increase of internationalisation activities.²⁰⁸ This leads the EU to highlight the Erasmus programme for its positive effect on universities and the student population: “The effects of Erasmus are not beneficial for the individual beneficiary alone. As well as promoting student and staff mobility, the programme has proved to be a catalyst for encouraging higher education institutions to modernise and become more international

more information see “Mobility: Closing the gap between policy and practice,” EUA Publications 2012, accessed April 15, 2013. http://www.maunimo.eu/images/Oslo/eua%20maunimo_web.pdf

²⁰² See for example: George Pasiás and Yannis Roussakis, “‘Who marks the bench?’ A critical review of the neo-European educational paradigm,” *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 10,1 (2012): 127-141. Or: Isabelle Bruno, “The ‘Indefinite Discipline’ of Competitiveness: Benchmarking as a Neoliberal Technology of Government,” *Minerva* 47,3 (2009): 261-280.

²⁰³ Bruno, *Benchmarking Neoliberal Technology*, 262.

²⁰⁴ Martin Lawn, “Standardizing the European Education Policy Space,” *European Educational Research Journal* 10,2 (2011): 264.

²⁰⁵ Ulrich Teichler, “Internationalisation of higher education: European experiences,” *Asia Pacific Education Review* 10 (2009): 94.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁰⁷ European Commission, *Erasmus for All Communication*, 6.

²⁰⁸ Teichler, *Internationalisation of higher education*, 104.

in outlook.”²⁰⁹ In this sense Erasmus and mobility in general have been awarded a key role in the internationalisation of higher education in the EU.

Internationalisation implies not only the exchange of academic staff or programmes for students to study at universities abroad. It also covers the content of courses, curriculum innovation and internationalisation (for example by employing English as the language of instruction), offering foreign language courses, joint international research initiatives or cross-cultural training.²¹⁰ Besides the many possibilities of becoming more international in outlook, the European Commission points out that “[o]nly a few highly visible universities have a real internationalisation strategy”.²¹¹ Based on that, I argue that through the EU discourse, in form of official documents and promotional material on higher education, the EU aims to encourage universities to engage in internationalisation activities.

... to make universities more flexible

Flexibility is another buzzword in the EU discourse. One aspect of flexibility is that students shall be flexible to be able to adapt to the needs of the labour market. This flexibility can be acquired for example through a mobility period abroad. But flexibility is similarly required from higher education institutions. The recognition of a mobility period does not only represent one of the main obstacles for a student to be mobile,²¹² but also requires that universities adapt and are flexible with regards to the needs of their students.

In many cases a study period abroad means a delay in the progress of studies. If studies taken abroad are not fully recognized and students do not receive the necessary credits they are not able to progress with their degree. Therefore the Council of Ministers highlighted “[t]he need for greater flexibility in terms of the validation and recognition of mobility periods abroad”.²¹³ Study programs and teachers shall be flexible with regards to course contents in different universities. In the context of the promotion of internationalisation in higher education a Head of an International Relations Office stated that “We try to be as

²⁰⁹ EU Publication, “Erasmus Higher Education fostering Internationalisation at European Universities European Success Stories,” (Luxembourg: Publications office of the European union, 2010), 5, accessed February 15, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/higher/success10_en.pdf

²¹⁰ Knight and de Wit, *Strategies for internationalisation of higher education*, 3.

²¹¹ European Commission, *Roadmap internationalisation strategy*, 3.

²¹² Netz, et al., *What deters students from studying abroad*, 19.

²¹³ Council of the European Union, “Results of the consultation on the Green Paper on the Learning Mobility of Young People. Commission Staff Working Document accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation Youth on the Move - Promoting the learning mobility of young people,” *13729/10* (September 17, 2010), 11.

flexible as possible, providing an “à la carte” service tailored to all our students’ needs”.²¹⁴ This sentence reflects that the flexibility discourse has already entered higher education institutions.

Another flexibility issue is related to the content and grading of exchange studies. This means that a study period abroad might raise the question if an Economics course taught at the London School of Economics can actually count the same as for example a similar course taught in a small university somewhere in Poland or France. According to the ECTS system the student’s performance is being measured against the other students of the same university but not on a wider European scale. This may not only lead to unfair anomalies through the variation of course content and the subjectivity of the evaluation methods of different teachers, but it makes it understandable that university staff may be somewhat reluctant to validate courses and grades achieved abroad.²¹⁵

The profile of students represents another concern of flexibility. With mass higher education the social background of students has become more diversified. In many European countries, at least 40% of the student population is regularly employed during their studies, whilst the employment rate is especially high among students from low social backgrounds.²¹⁶ The European Parliament highlights the “importance of flexible education programmes that are compatible with simultaneous employment”.²¹⁷ And in the same line “[o]pen universities, online education and more flexible university timetables for working students should be encouraged”.²¹⁸ Higher education institutions shall therefore adapt and cater for their increasingly diversified student population. University “programmes should become more flexible, to cater for the needs of a broader student population.”²¹⁹ Whereas at its beginning higher education institutions were mainly reserved for the elites, by now in many countries more than 50% of the student population come from families with no background in higher education.²²⁰ Other changes are the feminisation of higher education

²¹⁴ EU Publication, *Erasmus Higher Education fostering Internationalisation*, 20.

²¹⁵ Terrence Karran, “Achieving Bologna Convergence: Is ECTS Failing to Make the Grade?” *Higher Education in Europe* 24,3 (2004): 416.

²¹⁶ Dominic Orr, Christoph Gwosć and Nicolai Netz, “*Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. Synopsis of indicators*,” Eurostudent IV 2008–2011. Final report 2011, 90, accessed April 8, 2013. http://ww2.sozialerhebung.at/Ergebnisse/PDF/EIV_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

²¹⁷ European Parliament, *Report on Youth on the Move*, 8.

²¹⁸ European Parliament, “Invest more in education and youth mobility, say MEPs,” Committee on Culture and Education, *Press release IPRI7417* (April 11, 2011), 1.

²¹⁹ EU Publication, *Erasmus 25 years*, 4.

²²⁰ Orr, Gwosć and Netz, *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe*, 42.

(in a majority of European countries the proportion of female students is higher than of their male peer group) and students with children (one in eight students undertakes studies while caring for a child).²²¹

Another factor of diversified student population is posed by the possibility of mobility (short and long-term). Many study programmes and teachers see themselves confronted by a student population with broad and diverse backgrounds. A current Masters class (taught in English) counts with a increasingly mixed student population not only from different nationalities and therefore educational systems, but also different educational backgrounds with regards to the first degree. This means that (probably) at the beginning of a course a lot of time has to be devoted to bring the qualifications and former knowledge to the same level in order to develop new content on it.

Flexibility is therefore required from institutions with regards to student mobility and the recognition of the credits and/or diploma obtained abroad. More diverse student populations in terms of academic background and current lifestyles put new demands to institutions, programmes and teachers. Furthermore, I argue that flexibility is embedded in the neoliberal ideology of increasing quality education and fostering employability of graduates, which shall ultimately lead to a competitive Europe.

Shaping the (responsible) European citizen

Similar to the creation of an active European citizenship as explored before, when analysing official EU documents, it becomes clear that the EU uses higher education and mobility to promote citizens with certain characteristics. I have already argued that the notion of an (active) European citizenship implies that students shall become active and participate in democratic processes. Furthermore, I have discussed that the category of a European citizenship includes certain rights and obligations. In the following section I will examine how analysing the EU discourse adds some other crucial characteristics and traits which, I argue, are embedded in neoliberalism and define how a responsible European citizen should behave.

²²¹ Orr, Gwosć and Netz, *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe*, 60-68.

... the foreign language-speaking European

Language skills represent an essential component of the EU discourse on higher education. Besides the already explored emphasis on languages inherent in Europe's linguistic diversity, the mastering of foreign languages is seen as one of the basic skills of the European citizen.

According to the 2005 Eurobarometer survey only half of the European population speaks a foreign language. Nevertheless, almost all Europeans (98%) think that mastering foreign languages is useful for their children's future.²²² The EU discourse says “[f]oreign language skills and intercultural competences widen an individual's professional options, upgrade the skills of the European workforce and are essential elements of genuine European identity”.²²³ Speaking foreign languages is therefore a core characteristic of people holding a European identity. I further argue that it is not merely presented as a simple characteristic, but also as a responsibility of a European citizen. “A good command of foreign languages is a key competence essential to make one's way in the modern world and labour market”.²²⁴ Speaking foreign languages is therefore not only “a life-skill for all EU citizens”²²⁵ but also a condition to be successful on the labour market. In this sense, a responsible European citizen is, among other characteristics, someone who speaks several languages and engages in language learning.

Educational mobility is promoted as an excellent opportunity to improve one's language skills, since a mobility period abroad “is widely considered to contribute to enhancing the employability of young people through the acquisition of key skills and competences, including especially language competences and intercultural understanding”.²²⁶ Being able to speak foreign languages will make Europeans more likely to take advantage of the right of free movement within the EU and will represent an advantage for finding a job and making Europe more competitive.

²²² Eurobarometer Languages, “*Europeans and their languages*,” accessed April 3, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eurobarometer-survey_en.htm

²²³ European Commission, *Green Paper learning mobility*, 8.

²²⁴ Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on language competences*, 28.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

²²⁶ Council of the European Union, *Conclusions on benchmark for learning mobility*, 31.

... the flexible European

As mentioned before, flexibility is one of the buzzwords in the EU discourse on higher education. The current European labour market requires students to be flexible and to adapt to its changing conditions. With the emphasis on characteristics such as flexibility, the responsibility for success is placed on the people who are expected to adjust to the requirements of the labour market. Flexibility represents an important and constituent part of the knowledge economy: “The knowledge economy needs people with the right mix of skills: transversal competences, e-skills for the digital era, creativity and flexibility”.²²⁷

Again, mobility is seen as a tool which can cater for this flexibility: “Mobility is an important part of the flexibility which Europe seeks from its labour force, vital to the challenge of addressing its future skills needs in an economy of knowledge”.²²⁸ On the individual level, a study period abroad means a rupture from the students’ everyday routine. In a foreign country and environment students discover a whole set of new experiences which influence their individual dispositions, behaviours and abilities. Mobility can therefore not only bring important changes to how a person frames his/her identity with regards to a European dimension, but it also becomes a life lesson for flexibility demanding the student to adapt to the new environment inside and outside the university.²²⁹

... the (lifelong-) learning European

The idea of lifelong learning is closely linked to flexibility, since both ideas are seen as a necessity from the tenets of a neoliberal agenda.²³⁰ Lifelong learning is defined as “learning in all contexts - whether formal, non-formal or informal - and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning.”²³¹

In the analysed official EU documents, lifelong learning is presented as a means to achieve employability and flexibility, as well as contributing to personal development and

²²⁷ European Commission, *Supporting growth and jobs*, 2.

²²⁸ EU High Level Group, “Making learning mobility an opportunity for all,” Report from the High Level Group on Mobility, July 2008, 9, accessed December 20, 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/education/doc/2008/mobilityreport_en.pdf

²²⁹ Papatsiba, *European Higher Education Policy and the Formation of Entrepreneurial Students*, 190.

²³⁰ Mark Olssen, “Understanding the mechanisms of neoliberal control: lifelong learning, flexibility and knowledge capitalism,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 25,3 (2006): 213-230.

²³¹ Council of the European Union, *Conclusions on employability of graduates*, 3.

fulfilment. “The provision of key competences for all on a lifelong learning basis will play a crucial role in improving citizens’ employability, social inclusion and personal fulfilment.”²³² However, and regardless of the praised benefits, the EU laments that “[f]or the majority of Europeans, lifelong learning (LLL) is not a reality”.²³³ Therefore, the European Parliament “[c]alls on higher education institutions to integrate lifelong learning into their curricula, (...) and to adapt to a student base that includes adults, elderly people, non-traditional learners, full-time students who have to work while studying and people with disabilities”.²³⁴

Lifelong learning, as narrative of self-improvement and self-management, has been described to be a model of governing individuals and an instrument of flexible governmentality.²³⁵ This argumentation is reflected in the following statement of the Council of the European Union: “It is crucial (...) to prepare European citizens to be motivated and self-sustained learners able to contribute to promoting sustainable economic growth and social cohesion over a long period.”²³⁶ Hence, the European citizen shall be motivated, responsible and engage in lifelong learning in order to help making Europe a successful economy in the world. EU citizens are expected to assume responsibility and adapt by continuously improving and updating their skills through lifelong learning with the ultimate goal to become entrepreneurial (not reliant on the welfare state) and employable.

In the context of new technologies the European Commission stresses that now “[i]ndividuals can learn anywhere, at any time, following flexible and individualised pathways.”²³⁷ This could be read in two ways: On the one hand it can be regarded as positive that students who are, for example, working and studying at the same time, who

²³² Council of the European Union, “Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2010/C 135/02 (May 26, 2010), 4.

²³³ European Council and European Commission, “Modernising Education and Training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe,” 2012 joint interim report of the Council and of the Commission on the progress under the ‘Education and Training 2010’ work programme, *Official Journal of the European Union* 2012/C 70/05 (March 8, 2012), 13.

²³⁴ European Parliament, *Report on modernising Europe’s higher education*, 6.

²³⁵ See for example: William Walters and Jens Henrik Haahr. *Governing Europe: Discourse, Governmentality and European Integration* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 128. Or: Mark Olssen, “Understanding the mechanisms of neoliberal control: lifelong learning, flexibility and knowledge capitalism,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 25,3 (2006): 216.

²³⁶ Council of the European Union, “Council conclusions of 26 November 2012 on education and training in Europe 2020 — the contribution of education and training to economic recovery, growth and jobs,” *Official Journal of the European Union* 2012/C 393/02 (December 19, 2012), 6.

²³⁷ European Commission, *Rethinking Education*, 9.

have family or who took an alternative education path, have the possibility to engage in further training and learning. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as an obligation. Individuals have to study and continuously engage in learning in order to be a deserving European citizen. Or as Delanty and Rumford put it “[t]he EU has constructed a European education space – a European area of lifelong learning – within which citizenship is enacted through a commitment to learning.”²³⁸

... the employable European

Creating more and better jobs is one of the main aims of the Lisbon strategy. For this to happen “one of the goals of higher education must be to ensure employability”.²³⁹

In January 2013, the youth unemployment rate in Europe stood at 24%, with the highest rate in Greece (59%), followed by Spain (55%) and Italy (38%).²⁴⁰ Therefore it does not seem surprising that employability takes such an important position in the EU higher education discourse. Employability means the transition from university to work, or as the European Commission describes it the “combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during their career.”²⁴¹ Its importance for the EU can be seen in the fact that ‘employability’ is one of the few concepts that appears in almost all analysed documents.

One possible way to fight youth unemployment, or said differently, to ensure employability is through mobility. The European Commission states that “mobility is one of the fundamental ways in which individuals, particularly young people, can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development”.²⁴² Furthermore, mobility shall instil an interest and function as a preparation for professional mobility in later life.

By highlighting the positive effects that mobility has for the graduates’ future potential of employability, I argue that the EU discourse emphasises that the participation in mobility is becoming a duty and obligation for students (similarly to what the status of a European citizenship implies). Mobility does not only help individuals to increase their professional,

²³⁸ Delanty and Rumford, *Rethinking Europe*, 114.

²³⁹ European Parliament, *Report on Youth on the Move*, 6.

²⁴⁰ Eurostat Unemployment, “*Unemployment statistics*,” accessed March 29, 2013. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

²⁴¹ Council of the European Union, “Commission Staff working paper on the development of benchmarks on education and training for employability and on learning mobility,” *10697/11* (May 24, 2011), 4.

²⁴² European Commission, *Green Paper learning mobility*, 2.

social and intercultural skills but a study period abroad is actually seen “as a valuable experience by today’s employers”.²⁴³ The underlying message is therefore, that if you want to succeed on the labour market, you have to be mobile. Mobility is seen as an effective tool to secure distinction from other graduates.²⁴⁴ This goes in line with the neoliberal argumentation that it is the personal responsibility of individuals to make sure they qualify for employment.²⁴⁵

... the educated European

As already described in the theoretical background, in neoliberalism education is seen as a kind of service that equips citizens with the knowledge, skills and competences that eventually shall benefit both the individual and the society.²⁴⁶ Following this line of argumentation higher education is no longer a public good, but is “deemed to be a necessary life project for the individual”.²⁴⁷ European citizens are expected to be active and make themselves competitive on the labour market by consuming education.²⁴⁸

In neoliberalism individuals are constantly encouraged to improve their knowledge capital. In the context of crisis “[m]odern, knowledge-based economies require people with higher and more relevant skills.” One way of producing these highly skilled individuals is through mobility.

The emphasis on acquiring the relevant skills and knowledge is also emphasised when the Council of the EU describes mobility as “transitional mobility for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge, skills and competences”.²⁴⁹ With this argumentation, mobility in itself seems to be reduced to one single purpose, which is acquiring new skills and knowledge. Here, the EU discourse seems to limit the individual rights of citizens to acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge in order to make them more employable and contribute to Europe’s competitiveness.

²⁴³ EU Publication, *Erasmus Success Stories*, 4.

²⁴⁴ Brooks and Waters. *Student Mobilities, Migration and Internationalization*, 144.

²⁴⁵ Overbeek, *Globalization, neo-liberalism, employment*, 27.

²⁴⁶ Michael Kuhn and Ronald G. Sultana, “Introduction: Creating the European Learning Citizen,” in *Homo sapiens europæus? Creating the European learning citizen*, ed. Michael Kuhn and Ronald G. Sultana (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 15.

²⁴⁷ Delanty and Rumford, *Rethinking Europe*, 115.

²⁴⁸ Walkenhorst, *Explaining Change in EU Education Policy*, 576.

²⁴⁹ Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on language competences*, 28.

In sum, additionally to the rights and obligations implied in the category of European citizenship as discussed below, this section has uncovered how the EU uses higher education and mobility to promote citizens with certain characteristics. The analysis has revealed how the EU discourse constructs a citizen who through higher education and especially through mobility shall be flexible, foreign-language speaking, lifelong-learning with the overarching aim to be employable. All traits are embedded and promoted through a neoliberal rationality. Finally, enrolling on mobility and consuming education have been depicted as necessities of a responsible European citizen.

Conclusion and summary of findings

In times of economic crisis and decreasing support for the EU the popular quote of Delors seems to become even more significant: “You don’t fall in love with a common market, you need something else”.²⁵⁰ Since economic integration alone is not considered sufficient to create a sense of belonging to the European level, the EU created the idea of a common European identity in order to make people supportive of the European integration process and the EU institutions.²⁵¹ The EU discourse on higher education, analysed in this thesis, is one way to create and foster such a European identity feeling and promote citizens with certain characteristics.

One of the leading research strands was to investigate what kind of European identity and citizenship is promoted through the EU discourse and how it is constructed and shaped. For this I analysed the EU discourse on higher education in form of official EU documents and publications to investigate how this European identity is constructed and framed. One way of constructing a collective identity is through common symbols. I have argued that the Erasmus programme, the most famous European educational programme, represents a European symbol. Symbols that are shared and commonly understood among Europeans, like the Erasmus programme, shall make people feel emotionally connected to Europe and function as a link between them. Furthermore, the EU discourse emphasises the European (cultural and linguistic) diversity and the shared past, present and future of Europe. Behind

²⁵⁰ Jaques Delors in Bideleux, *Problems of Building a Pan-European Identity*, 25.

²⁵¹ Stavrakakis, *Passions of Identification*, 81.

this stands the assumption, that when Europeans increasingly appreciate Europe's diversity, they will become more emotionally attached to Europe. Furthermore, with the awareness of sharing a common past, present and future, Europeans will sense a feeling of unity among them. These three aspects build together the basis on which a European identity feeling can emerge.

With regard to the question of what kind of European identity and citizenship is promoted, I showed that the category of European citizenship does not only include fundamental rights (such as free movement) but the emphasis has increasingly shifted towards duties and responsibilities. Inherent in the notion of an active European citizenship promoted through the EU discourse, is that students shall become active and participate in democratic processes. By that it is hoped to reduce the democratic deficit and bring citizens closer to the EU and its institutions.²⁵²

My second research purpose was to uncover the EU discourse on higher education and student mobility and to discuss how it is linked to the construction of a European identity. One of the main findings is that the EU discourse on higher education is connected to neoliberal ideology. Competition and mobility were found to be two overarching themes in the EU discourse on higher education. Competition has been identified as a thread linking a variety of concepts in higher education. Europe competes for having the best education system and the member states for having the best universities. On a level below, higher education institutions compete for the most talented students and to be among the first places in international rankings. Member states and universities have to compete against the 'others,' in the form of the main competitors, the US and Japan. At the same time they have to attract the 'others' in form of non-European students to become more international in outlook and for reasons of income (tuition fees). On the individual level, students compete to gain entry to the best universities and, at a later stage, for the most attractive mobility placements abroad and ultimately for employment.

Mobility is the other main theme that takes a key role and is presented as a kind of panacea in the EU discourse on higher education. Mobility is described to have the potential to make universities more competitive and international, and to increase quality. At the same time mobility requires universities to be flexible because of the increasingly diverse student population and with regards to the recognition of study periods abroad. For

²⁵² Bee, *Institutionally constructed European identity*, 444.

students mobility represents a means to become more employable, flexible and competitive.

In this thesis I have revealed that the category of European identity is not an empty category in terms of content that Europeans can simply slip over and adapt, but it is already filled with certain ideas and characteristics, which are promoted through the EU discourse on higher education. The EU constructs an idea of a (responsible) European citizen who through higher education and especially through mobility shall be flexible, speak foreign languages, engage in lifelong learning, all this with the overarching aim to become more employable. Ultimately students shall become those responsible, competitive and enterprising Europeans that will help Europe to be successful. In the same line, I have uncovered mobility and education not only as fundamental rights of European citizens but also as obligations of a responsible European.

Closing discussion and future outlook

One of the findings of this thesis is that the EU uses the discourse on higher education to create responsible, flexible and mobile individuals. Throughout the analysed official EU documents, mobility is promoted as something positive. However, not everybody might see or agree with this view and the objectives and advantages of being mobile. In current times people are increasingly required to be mentally and geographically flexible, constantly adapting to new situations and being prepared to move to wherever it is needed to earn a living. But it should be asked if with this flexibility we lose somewhere else. The required flexibility affects not only the life of the individual, but has also broader implications, for example for family structures, dynamics and values. This leads to the point of what happens if a person does not want, or does not have the possibility to become mobile and flexible. Is he/she then excluded from a European identity and the benefits a mobility period can bring (such as being more employable)?

This question is also closely linked to the actual impact the EU discourse on higher education and European educational programmes can have on European citizens, taking into account that higher education only reaches a small percentage of the European population. Statistics say that in 2010 (only) an average of 25% of the EU working age

population had successfully completed a university degree or similar educational level.²⁵³ In 2010 the EU counted with about 20 million students who were enrolled in higher education institutions, which is equivalent to 61% of all persons aged 20 to 24. Compared to a total population of 500 million this represents a share of 4% who are currently receiving higher education. The share of students of the total student population who have enrolled on a short-term mobility period lays between 5 and 10%.²⁵⁴ These figures show that the share of Europeans who are excluded from higher education and mobility is much larger than those people who are actually included and can benefit from it. As already suggested by Kuhn,²⁵⁵ by addressing only highly educated individuals, educational programmes such as Erasmus actually exclude low educated individuals who do not have the opportunities to partake in educational programmes and exchanges. This also indicates that student mobility is only one tool to foster a European identity. If the EU wants to make a real impact and promote a European identity among its citizens, the scope of actions should be broadened aiming to reach also the less educated population and those who do not want or do not have the possibilities to be mobile and/or access to higher education.

In this thesis I have shown that the EU discourse on higher education ascribes a lot of power to mobility with regards to the impacts for the individual (ensuring a better job, becoming flexible, etc.). Here it should be stated that mobility during university studies alone might not be considered as sufficient to secure entry into professional employment.²⁵⁶ In order to ensure future employability, many students take several preparatory measures to stand out of the masses of other graduates, by supplementing their degree with a set of qualifications and skills. This starts with choosing the university based on its status, engaging in extra-curricular activities, taking up internships and pursuing postgraduate qualifications.²⁵⁷ Therefore mobility only represents a tiny piece in the whole picture in the creation of a competitive and successful European labourer.

²⁵³ Eurostat Education, "Education statistics at regional level," accessed May 7, 2013. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Education_statistics_at_regional_level

²⁵⁴ Currently there exist no exact numbers of the total percentage of students who have been enrolled for a short-term credit or long-term degree mobility. For more information on short-term mobility see: Eurostudent Mobility, "Intelligence Brief: Short-term mobility and mobility obstacles," accessed May 8, 2013. http://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/IB_Short_term_mobility_091211.pdf

²⁵⁵ Theresa Kuhn, "Why Educational Exchange Programmes Miss their Mark: Cross-border Mobility, Education and European Identity," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50,6 (2012): 994-1010.

²⁵⁶ Brooks and Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and Internationalization*, 31.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

This study represents a small contribution to a wider project of critical investigation of how European identity is promoted and constructed through the EU discourse. This thesis could of course not cover the full dynamics of EU communication on European identity and citizenship. The chosen documents for the analysis were limited in topic (focusing exclusively on higher education) and time (2007 to 2013). Interesting avenues for further research could therefore be to look at a longer time frame and include other topics, such as EU cultural policy.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, to form a complete image one could explore the working mechanisms of the institutions more elaborately. This would imply for example to investigate who decides what is written, if there are rules on how things have to be phrased and presented, and to find out more on the decision procedures of where and in which context publications can and shall be published.

Similarly, it would be interesting to examine how much impact the EU discourse actually has on the individuals, and what of it becomes taken-for-granted knowledge. Most likely the analysed official EU policy documents are mainly read by academics, policy makers and staff working in higher education, whereas the promotional material are read by a wider public. But we do not have any knowledge on the process how the written words are interpreted and how they are assimilated. Therefore, a further research avenue could be to explore how the messages conveyed through the EU discourse are being perceived and eventually transformed into taken-for-granted knowledge.

A final suggestion for future research would be to apply the same methodology and research approach, carrying out a critical discourse analysis of the EU discourse by studying official EU documents and promotional material in the field of EU cultural policy. The cultural sector of the EU counts with a budget of 1.6 billion Euros for the period 2014-2020 and programmes such as the European capital of culture, EU culture prizes and the mobility of artists and cultural workers.²⁵⁹ Similar to the mobility in higher education, it is assumed that through the promotion of a shared European culture a sense of European consciousness and a common European identity will emerge. Therefore, a future study could investigate if it is a different kind of European identity that is promoted through EU cultural policy than the one fostered in the EU higher education discourse.

²⁵⁸ See also suggestions for future research below.

²⁵⁹ Compared to 15.2 billion Euros, which the European Commission envisages to allocate to education and training. See: EU Budget, "A budget for Europe (2014-2020)," accessed April 28, 2013. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/budget/bu0001_en.htm

Shall cultural workers and artists also be competitive, flexible and contribute to Europe's competitiveness? Or does the EU discourse on cultural policy promote a different kind of European identity?

To conclude I want to end on a personal note. A friend of mine, who had closely followed the development of this thesis, asked me if now with this academic work I had changed my standpoint towards higher education. My immediate answer was negative. However, this academic work allowed me to see things more critically and I have become more sensitive to certain issues regarding higher education. After this thesis, I still do not count myself to the people who see the neoliberal developments in higher education as something merely negative. As described previously, it can be said that I agree with the EU discourse that aims to promote a responsible European citizen. I do think that we need (responsible) European citizens, who are well equipped in terms of skills and competences and engage in education activities. The traits promoted through the EU discourse, such as being flexible, competitive, foreign-language speaking are indeed helpful and needed in current times to face the future challenges. Furthermore, I believe that students enrol in higher education (some even have to pay for it) for a specific purpose, expecting certain outcomes. Being a student myself I want to receive education that increases my employability and ensures to succeed on the competitive labour market and get a job. However, opposed to what has been suggested in the analysed documents, I argue that higher education should remain a (affordable) right for everybody, not an obligation. In addition, if somebody cannot or is not willing to meet the promoted characteristics (for example being flexible and mobile), he/she should still have the possibility to be considered as a (responsible) European citizen. The traits promoted through the EU discourse should not become normative and exclusive. It should rather be an option to obtain those characteristics through enrolling in higher education and mobility. Ultimately, Europe's motto is united in diversity, and it is this possibility for diversity what makes Europe distinctive.

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