

# Internationalisation of HE may be accelerating

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Over the past months, since the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States – in particular after the transition – many articles have been published about the negative impact of these two events on the internationalisation of higher education in the United States and the United Kingdom and beyond.

The increasing wave of nationalist, populist, anti-immigration and anti-globalisation trends in the United States, Europe and countries like Turkey and the Philippines make us wonder if the end of internationalisation is near.

Philip Altbach and I (*University World News*, edition 436, 2016) have already written a rather gloomy article on Brexit and Trump, with the headline "[Now we face the \(temporary?\) end of American internationalism](#)". Certainly, the present situation does not look promising for the US and the UK.

If elections in France, the Netherlands and Germany bring conservative, even nationalist governments to power, this may have a negative impact on the numbers of international students they take, the budgets of programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 and the Bologna Process as a whole.

One can only hope that, in reaction to Brexit and Trump, a counter-reaction will emerge, like the recent demonstrations against corruption in Romania. There are, however, several positive developments in internationalisation of higher education which are worthwhile mentioning.

## Internationalisation still alive and kicking

First, we see an awakening of realisation of the importance of internationalisation in the two countries themselves. Students, faculty and leadership in both countries have strongly criticised attempts to reduce the admission of international students. In the United Kingdom, they have emphasised the importance of international students, of international faculty and of participation in European programmes.

Although US federal programmes and activities like Fulbright might be in danger of severe budget cuts, foundations, institutions and 'blue' states will move in the opposite direction. The interest in study abroad in both countries appears to be on the increase rather than slowing down.

Second, we see an increase in internationalisation elsewhere. Some recent examples include:

- A study by the US-based organisation AFS, *Mapping Generation Z*, based on a survey of 13-18 year olds in 27 countries who speak 16 languages among them and on 5,200 responses, concludes that the next generation is eager to discover the world;
- The Erasmus+ programme, this year celebrating its 30th anniversary, has seen an increase in the number of students and faculty and the activities undertaken and seems to be restricted from doing more only because of its limited budget;
- According to EP-Nuffic, the percentage of Dutch students studying abroad has reached a record, up from 22% in 2012-13 to 24% in 2013-14. Half of them receive support through Erasmus+;

- Australia also shows a strong increase in study abroad. According to a survey among 36 universities, almost 20% of undergraduate students have had an overseas experience, a remarkable percentage for a country better known for its high numbers of incoming international students. Europe and North America are no longer the sole destinations for students. The Colombo Plan, promoting exchanges with Asia, has become a driver of outbound mobility;
- The higher education sector everywhere, and in particular in Europe, is now taking the lead in addressing the educational needs of refugees;
- Germany is well on track to reach its target of 350,000 international students in 2020; Russia has expanded its target to 200,000 international students and China is also seeing a substantial increase in international student numbers;
- Recent studies, for instance by Campus France, show increased mobility of students within regions such as Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as between them, breaking with the traditional South-North flows. Internationalisation has become a central component of national and institutional policies on these three continents and there is more awareness of the need to move from mobility to internationalisation at home;
- During recent visits to Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, I was struck by the efforts of education institutions there to develop their own internationalisation agenda, with an increased focus on internationalising the curriculum and learning outcomes. This awareness has been strengthened in reaction to threatening developments in the United States under the Trump administration.

These few examples indicate that internationalisation is not dead, but more alive than ever. What seems to be happening is a shift away from the traditional dominance of the industrialised world towards emerging and developing economies. The decrease of international graduate admissions in the United States over the past three years is an illustration – an existing trend that was already taking place and is now accelerating as a result of Brexit, Trump and the rise of nationalist movements.

In *The Globalization of Internationalization*, a recent book I co-authored with Nico Jooste, Jocelyne Gacel-Avila and Elspeth Jones, we observe that institutions of higher education in emerging and developing countries have to make choices to find the right balance between local, national, regional and global roles in their efforts to internationalise.

Following Western models is an option, but is no guarantee for success. This creates new opportunities for internationalising on equal terms as initiatives increase in the emerging world.

Internationalisation is not dead; indeed, it might be accelerating and undergoing profound changes in response to Brexit and Trump. The United States and the United Kingdom may be the most affected by the current political climate.

Germany, France and the Netherlands are all actively promoting internationalisation. The results of this year's elections will show whether they are following the US and the UK down a negative spiral or embracing the example of Canada and making a leap forward.

But, as I suggested [in my previous University World News blog](#), the revolution in internationalisation will come from other parts of the world.

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