

**GOVERNING EDUCATION, GOVERNING EUROPE?  
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE LISBON MODEL**

**ANNE CORBETT**

a.corbett@lse.ac.uk | London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

**ABSTRACT**

The weaknesses of the Lisbon model of governance, as exemplified by the intergovernmental open method of coordination, has been widely aired in the literature. This paper suggests in contrast that there are strengths in this form of policymaking for strategic ends, and when applied to nationally sensitive policy domains. An examination of OMC-education throughout the Lisbon decade shows the evolution of policy-making through Lisbon 1, Lisbon 2 and Europe 2020, finding that the 'governance architecture' has been stabilised and the policy domain of education enriched by a balance between social dimension and competitiveness. The paper suggests however by way of conclusion that the outlook for the Lisbon model is now suspended on the outcome of the institutional upheaval being played out in the EU as a consequence of the economic crisis, and which demands democratic solutions.

**KEY WORDS**

EU; Higher education; Lisbon agenda; Open Method of Coordination; Policy process.



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# Governing Education, Governing Europe? Strengths and Weaknesses of the Lisbon Model

Anne Corbett

## INTRODUCTION

The EU's Lisbon strategy takes a lot of flak. As the EU updates and adapts the strategy for a second decade, *Europe 2020*, (Council of the European Union, 2010; European Commission, 2010) this paper is a plea for a reading which opens up a more nuanced reading of the Lisbon Process. Education is a policy sector that raises many questions about the hopes and deceptions involved in European-level problem solving and European-level solutions. In a sector seen as essentially national, and hence sensitive, we should expect such questions. But to adapt a phrase from Maassen and Olsen's book on the politics of universities and Europe, education presents a particular problem: as an object of policy at the European level. It still seems that education has been over-debated and under-investigated (Olsen & Maassen, 2007, p. xi). This paper will focus on the political process that has generated the latest strategy.

The particular targets of the academic criticism of Lisbon education policy are its ideology and methodology. In this critique EU strategy is viewed as neo-liberal, i.e based on ending the concept of education as a public good, and accepting – if not encouraging – the commodification of knowledge (Jayasuriya, 2010; Pasiás & Roussakis, 2009; Robertson, 2010; Robertson & Dale, 2006; Sörlin & Vessuri, 2007). Among the consequences are that consumerist ideas gain more weight, as does the management of reputation (Hazelkorn, 2011).

The methodology used, the Open Method of Coordination, borrows from new public management concepts of quality control as measured against objectives, target setting and performance, and peer learning and feedback.

EU policy-making has long been criticised for depoliticising questions of policy choice (Shore, 2008). The EU has handed control of policy to experts and a policy elite (Lawn & Lingard, 2002). As Grek and colleagues put it: 'the European education space is being constructed by data' (Grek *et al.*, 2009a; Grek, Lawn, Lingard & Varjo, 2009b; Lawn & Keiner, 2006; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola, 2011). Recent legal scholarship adds to this critique. The Lisbon strategy – and even more the Bologna Process, which, contemporaneously, has been creating a European Higher Education Area – are seen as an affront to the democratic institutions of the EU, in virtually ignoring the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice.

This notion of a diminished democracy is taken up by Garben in an exhaustive study of EU higher education law (Garben, 2010). She challenges the view of OMC education as flexible and respectful of national identity (Garben, 2010, p. 89). As she sees it, soft law is a 'treacherously powerful' policy source. Not only is it a relatively unchecked and unlimited method of policy-making, since it does not have an explicit base in law but is 'unchecked and unlimited' (Garben, 2010, p. 89).

Do we have in this view of OMC's power the explanation of the puzzle as to why the Lisbon strategy for education was taken up very rapidly? For within five years, education had become one of the most institutionalised policy sectors under the OMC (Laffan & Shaw, 2005). Education has moved from the margins, not even meriting a mention as a specific policy sector in 2000 in the launch of the Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth (Council of the European Union, 2000). With each revision of the process, education has become more entrenched as a policy that the EU regards as crucial. In 2010, when the European Council accepted *Europe 2020*, as an integrated strategy for 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' cutting across several policy sectors (Council of the European Union, 2010, European Commission, 2010), education was a key element at the core of a four-pronged growth strategy.

This paper challenges the preceding critiques. It suggests that the question of how and why education has assumed such a place in the *Europe 2020* strategy, can be clarified by applying some middle-range theory and looking more closely at the policy-making that underlies the Lisbon strategy and *Europe 2020*. Education might contribute to a wider range of literature on Europeanisation. To this

end, I use a methodology of policy change that takes account of factors that do not feature in some of the critiques mentioned above. The basic assumptions of such an analysis are that ideas will get nowhere without institutional support, and that mobilisation of institutional support is not only determined by rules but by a context in which the dynamics of problem-setting, policy formulation and political mood coalesce (Kingdon, 1995). We can see in such instances whether that process conforms to the rules and whether the choices are, or are not, neo-liberal.

The paper starts with an overview of the developments up to the present. The second half of the paper looks at the factors susceptible to account for change. The final section returns to the issues of democracy and the strength and limits of the European process.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE EUROPE

In order to trace the evolution of educational policy-making in the EU strategy for jobs and growth, the decade is seen as consisting of three policy episodes. A distinction is made between Lisbon: 2000-2005; Lisbon 2: 2005-2009; and Europe 2020 (2010 – planned for 2020). The main policy-making actors considered are the European Council, the Council of Ministers and the Commission and the activities which intersect with each other and with national governments on a permanent basis and on occasion with the European Parliament and stakeholders.

### LISBON 1 – EDUCATION AS SOCIAL POLICY IN THE EU STRATEGY

The Lisbon strategy was launched at a moment of hope. The economy was strong, the dot-com revolution looked promising, but there were two worries. One was Europe's competitiveness in an increasingly inter-connected global economy. The other was a stubborn rate of unemployment and its social repercussions. The EU's elected heads of state and government met for the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 believing that they had a new solution. They committed to a knowledge economy to boost both competitiveness and social cohesion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The EU should aim, within the decade, «to have the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion» (European Council of the European Union, 2000, para 5).



The method they chose, the OMC, had been tried in the employment strategy but was controversial on the proposed scale. It required governments to commit to common objectives, targets, benchmarks, a work programme and peer review and a methodology that implied the involvement of national officials and experts. The initiative also largely cut out the European Parliament and was outside the reach of the European Court of Justice.

As such, the OMC was immediately seen as a step back for EU integration (Scharpf, 2002), a second best where hierarchical or Community method was not possible (Bulmer, 2012). But some detailed studies of education suggest a different reading. What the OMC offered was the chance to define and commit to common objectives and feedback, acting as much as anything, as of form of policy-learning (Souto Otero, Fleckenstein & Dacombe, 2008). Comparative studies of European policy-making equally underline that the OMC, a form of intensive trans-governmentalism, is trying to achieve something different from the decision-making structures operating under EU law (Wallace, 2005).

For the EU leaders, there were three priorities in preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society: (i) to develop the information society and R&D, including stepping up the process of structural reform for competitiveness and innovation, and completing the internal market (ii) to modernise the European social model by investing in people and combating social exclusion (iii) to sustain a healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects [as it seemed then] by applying an appropriate macro-economic policy mix.

The European Council believed that education should contribute to the modernised social model, and in particular, to a social dimension: a the strategy 'for living and working in a knowledge-based society'. Hence the request from the European Council to the Council of Ministers. At this stage, education was not seen as contributing to innovation.

## LISBON 2 – EDUCATION'S INNOVATION POTENTIAL RECOGNISED

By 2004, the general Lisbon strategy was in trouble. It was already clear that the targets for the decade would not be met. A committee under the chairmanship of the former Dutch Prime Minister, Wim Kok recommended simplifying the strategy by stripping it of its social element (Kok, 2004). The Commission president refined the strategy in a more neo-liberal way. This was basically accepted by the European Council in 2005 (European Council, 2005), although the Luxembourg presidency of 2006 was to restore the social dimension.

This phase extended the mechanics of OMC to include an obligation whereby national governments were to produce annual reports and act on feedback.

For education, Lisbon 2 paradoxically represented an advance. Education was recognised as a policy sector in its own right. This time, the European Council recognised education's potential for stimulating innovation. As the EU leaders put it, «It was a sector which helped to make it possible to turn knowledge into an added value and to create more and better jobs, a complement to research and innovation» (European Council, 2005, para 8).

#### EUROPE 2020 – EDUCATION AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EU STRATEGY

By the time the Lisbon decade had drawn to a close, the economic climate had changed dramatically. The financial crisis of 2008 was spreading to the economy at large. The Commission president took the initiative of launching a strategy for 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' for a new decade of coordinated effort (European Commission, 2010, p. 5) and strengthening a 'holistic' governance architecture, designed to facilitate strategic, i.e. medium and long term, policy-making (Borrás & Radaelli, 2011).

There was a logic to the fact that after ten years' experience, integrated guidelines were proposed for all the policy sectors involved in the jobs, growth and innovation strategy, and for thematic rather than sectoral initiatives to be established. The digital agenda, innovation, youth, low carbon and resource efficient Europe, industrial policy with an emphasis on new skills and jobs, and anti-poverty measures were defined as 'flagships' of EU strategy. Education became integral to three them, the initiatives dubbed Youth on the Move, Agenda for New Skills and Jobs and Innovation Union.

The targets were sector-specific. The 2020 targets relate to employment (that 75% of the 20-64 age group should be employed); R&D and innovation (that 3% of the GDP should be devoted to the sector); climate change and energy (renewable energy to reach 20% and greenhouse emissions to be 20% down to the 1990 level); education (early school leaving should be reduced to under 10 % and at least 40% of the 30-34 age group should have completed tertiary education); and poverty and social exclusion (to reduce the population at risk by 20 mn).

In sum, the European Council, in approving Europe 2020, was maintaining that education needed to contribute to four elements of the EU growth



strategy: the acquisition and production of knowledge and the innovation that might follow; the development of a more sustainable economy; higher levels of employment and greater social inclusion.

## THE SITUATION IN 2012: INSTRUMENTALISED OR ENRICHED?

### TARGETS

Targets may be the measure of the success of EU strategy that most easily comes to mind. Early research suggested that outcomes were disappointing (Ertl, 2006). In these terms, not much has changed: literacy levels are actually falling. Except for maths and science teacher recruitment, targets will not be reached by 2020. But these figures are merely indicative rather than a balanced evaluation. The targets were the outcome of difficult intergovernmental negotiations where vetoes, informal as well as formal come into play. For example there was no consensus for a target of the numbers of languages mastered. Furthermore the averages hide significant diversity among member states (see table 1).

However, the targets have stimulated the reporting of data and the production of publications such as the Commission staff working papers. These fact-filled documents have preceded the presentation of the Council-Commission joint reports to the European Council every two years. Such reporting procedures, which make much of the data transparent, as Grek *et al.* note (Grek *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b), can feed back into the political process in national policy arenas, to challenge comfortably entrenched national perceptions.<sup>2</sup>

### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

The use of the new political space created by the Lisbon strategy provides a second measure of EU education and training activity. In the early years, while EU strategic thinking on education and training was mainly focussed on supporting employment policy and developing lifelong learning (European Commission, 1998), the policy that the EU was actually managing centred

<sup>2</sup> For example, Eastern European countries are outperforming Western European countries on the higher education achievements of young adults in the 30-34 generation (Council and European Commission, 2008).

SCHOOL LEVEL BENCHMARKS			
	Decline in low achievers in reading (% 15 year olds)	Decline in early school leavers (% 18-24 year olds)	Rise in upper secondary completion (% 20-24 years olds)
EU average 2000	21.3	17.6	76.6
EU average 2006	24.1	15.3	77.8
Target for 2010	17.0	10.0	85.0
Source	OECD (PISA)	Eurostat (LFS)	Eurostat (LFS)
OTHER TARGETS			
	Rise in participation in lifelong learning %25-64 age group	Rise in graduates in mathematics, science and technology (MST) (% increase)	Rise in participation in pre-school learning: four year-olds (2000 to 2005)
EU average 2000	7.0	baseline	82.8
EU average 2006	9.6	+25	85.7
Target for 2010	12.5	+15	n/a
Source	Eurostat (LFS)	Eurostat (UOE)	Eurostat (UOE)

TABLE 1 – BENCHMARKS AND ACHIEVEMENTS 2006  
COMPILED FROM COUNCIL AND COMMISSION (2008)

on the mobility programmes that arose out of the pioneering Erasmus programme: the Socrates initiative for general education; Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training; and Tempus, which focussed on Central and Eastern Europe and was created in response to the political shifts taking place in Europe in 1989. By 2012, policy-making aimed at strategic growth, innovation and jobs had been turned into programmed activities that were legitimised by the oft-derided Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and made more dynamic by the policy-making ‘architecture’ of Lisbon.

The policies as of 2012 (within the financial framework of 2007-2013) showed how EU activity had expanded into six main areas of activity:

- 1 The general framework for education and training that follows from the Lisbon strategy



- ii The lifelong learning programme consisting of six strands: school education; e-learning; higher education including teacher training and language learning; mobility and lifelong learning
- iii Vocational education (VET) consisting on activity based on Europass (the common CV template), programmes, agencies and the recognition of qualifications
- iv Youth activity: the European Youth Pact, the White Paper on Youth and a number of programmes
- v Education, training and youth-centred (ETY) cooperation with non-EU countries: programmes of cooperation and activity connected with EU enlargement
- vi Sport: including the internal market for sport and the the fight against drug use and hooliganism

In concrete terms, this includes educational exchanges for students and teachers from all types of institutions, not just higher education; improved recording of learning outcomes (e.g., the Europass CV templates); the development of a European Qualifications Framework onto which national qualifications can be mapped in terms of levels from primary school to tertiary education; backing for the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Process) outside the EU framework, the Bologna process and in VET (the Copenhagen process) in order to promote high quality education in Europe; encouragement for knowledge and innovation-based communities (KICs) linking universities, research organisations, companies and foundations under the umbrella of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT); and last but not least, more opportunities for young people in terms of education and employability through mobility, work experience, volunteering, and health and culture-based initiatives.<sup>3</sup>

As the Lisbon strategy has progressed and policies have become more integrated, there have been spillover effects from related policy areas (Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg, 2011). This is taken forward in the Europe 2020 strategy for ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ and the Multiannual Financial Framework covering the growth and jobs agendas (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy). Rather less remarked, but important for policy outcomes nonetheless, is the interaction within the

<sup>3</sup> [http://europa-eu/pol/educ/index\\_en.htm](http://europa-eu/pol/educ/index_en.htm) (Retrieved 18/05.2012).

policy sector, which has led to reframing as initiatives for schooling have acquired a bigger place in policy.

## EXPLAINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE EUROPE

### INSTITUTIONS

The way in which institutions react to policy ideas in a particular context serves to explain, to a great extent, how in Nóvoa & Lawn's phrase, Europe is 'fabricated' (Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002). The notable fact about the OMC is that it provided a solution to a problem that had bedevilled EU education over decades: how to operate in a policy domain considered national (Corbett, 2003, 2005). Cooperation based on weak and ambiguous Treaty law had caused breakdowns in the policy process in the 1970s. EEC jurisprudence with the ECJ and the Commission playing a dual role in the 1980s to get programmes and in the 1990s to guarantee students' rights had produced results (Shaw, 1999). But the extension of jurisprudence created new tensions as well. It was only in 1992, with Treaty Article 126 (now Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, Article 165) making education subject to the subsidiarity rules, that the issue was 'tamed' (Dogan, 2005) and Treaty competence ceased to be a headline question.

The OMC does not appear to have de-politicised EU politics as some claim. But OMC-managed strategy has freed policy-making from the day-to-day political timetable, which with 27 member states means elections are a permanent event. It has thereby provided member states with a strategy for managing long-term issues. This is an additional dimension, not a replacement for conventional processes. For the first time, actors in the policy domains concerned manage key parts of their mandate within a stable process. The OMC has allowed the Commission and the Council to progress from opportunistic to strategic policy-making under the umbrella of the European Council. The OMC therefore occupies a space in which policy coordination is thought to be more effective than policy legislation. More than acting merely as a template of rules, practices and organisational capabilities (Gornitzka, 2007, p. 176), the new architecture has begun to exert an impact on the *raison d'être* of the EU (Borrás & Radaelli, 2011, p. 464).



The stability lies in the policy cycle that the European Council imposed on the Council and the Commission with regard to the growth and innovation sectors (Corbett, 2012). Each sector has had to report back to the biennial European Council meeting devoted to the Lisbon strategy and receive the strategic guidelines for the next round. Progress can be measured via the joint reports of the Council and Commission (see Table 2), later backed up by detailed staff working reports on the data used. Conventional political decision-making came into play when the issue was how to bolt on new and existing activities. The joint reports to the European Council by the Council (education) and the Commission provide an overview of changing preoccupations and achievements over the decade. The report of 2004, which was notable – maybe even a watershed in policy (Gornitzka, 2006) – presented all EU education and training activities within a programmatic, coherent framework for the first time. This included cooperation with two Europe-wide processes aimed at creating a higher education and a vocational education and training space (The Bologna Process created in 1999 and the Copenhagen Process for enhanced cooperation in VET, created in 2002). Over time, the concept of education has been gradually broadened and enriched. At one end of the spectrum is the current approach toward policy framing, which embodies the concept of the knowledge triangle: the higher education system, which educates and trains, conducts pure and applied research,

2002	The detailed work programme to follow up on objectives of educational and training systems in Europe
2004	Education and Training 2010: The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms.
2006	Modernising Education and Training: a Vital Contribution to Prosperity and Social Cohesion in Europe: Joint Interim Report of the Council and Commission on Progress under the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme
2008	Delivering Lifelong Learning for Knowledge, Creativity and Innovation: Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of 'Education and Training 2010'
2010	'Key Competences for a Changing World: 2010 Joint Progress Report of the Council and Commission on the Implementation of the Education and Training Work Programme

**TABLE 2 – EVALUATING LISBON PROGRESS: THE JOINT REPORTS**

is internationally committed to the circulation of the brightest ideas and the brightest students and academics. At the other end of the spectrum is the goal of more inclusive schooling.

By the end of the decade, this institutional framework had enabled the Commission and the Council to feed policy ideas back to the European Council, notably on issues of creativity and competence. In Lisbon 1, the education policy-makers had been struggling to catch up with the new strategy; hence the intensive institutionalisation in the first phase. By Lisbon 2, major consolidation was taking place within the education and training sector. The support for the Bologna Process had also brought higher education onto the scene. By EU2020, the EU education policy area had expanded to cover all sectors from school to lifelong learning and links had also been established with the other Lisbon sectors: employment, cohesion policy and research and innovation. The Council's appropriation of the knowledge triangle (Council of the European Union, 2009) as an element in its strategy served to underpin, even more strongly, education's place in EU policy.

#### IDEAS

The ideas picked up by institutions were a second element in the new dynamic affecting education and training policy. The evidence suggests that although the policy ideas reflected EU strategy, they were never as ideologically frozen as some suggest. Past generations had experienced the Community's promotion of post-war reconciliation through the universities, and the 1950s revival of universities as part of EU industrial policy (Corbett, 2005). The advent of the Single Market in the 1980s encouraged ambitious policy-makers to frame educational initiatives in human capital terms even where not appropriate.

The advent of knowledge as a concept to exploit, as both problem and solution, marked a new turning point and was driven by the White Paper of 1993 on growth competitiveness and employment (European Commission, 1993). The Treaty of Amsterdam formalised the importance of the concept by enshrining it as an EU objective: «the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating» (Treaty of Amsterdam 1997, Article 1-2). Behind this lay the view that Europe's economic growth could not be assured by simply tackling unemployment (in any event a policy that had



failed). Europe needed to be competitive globally. That meant embracing the knowledge economy, but also – a detail often forgotten – knowledge-based society. Not only did individuals need to be equipped with appropriate skills but also innovation had to be encouraged. Social cohesion was an essential part of the mix. When the Commission educational services took up these topics in 1998 in a policy document entitled «Towards a Europe of Knowledge» (European Commission, 1997), they were promoting the strategic idea of education as an instrument of employment policy that was to be embedded within a performance-related European Economic Strategy (EES) (Pépin, 2011; Souto Otero *et al.*, 2008).

As the Lisbon strategy developed, the narrow view of knowledge was replaced by initiatives that acknowledged the complex interaction between the acquisition of cognitive skills, competence and creativity.<sup>4</sup> As Maria João Rodrigues, a policy-maker behind the Lisbon strategy asserted, «Knowledge is inseparable from education» (Rodrigues, 2002, p. 4). Evidence provided by activities in 2012 seems to have proven her right. Events helped. The unexpected creation of the Bologna Process from 1998 to 1999, the new ideas that flooded into the EU with enlargement to the East, the expansion of the Lisbon strategy to school and teacher education, and the first steps to create a European Research Area and support doctoral students brought home to EU policy-makers that the purpose of education could not be entirely subsumed in EU social policy, or even in social policy and innovation.

At the same time, member states were ready to concede that for a decade or more they had had problems in managing their education systems, and especially higher education. They were ready for some appropriate EU dynamic.

#### POLICY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A third element which helps to account for change was the activity of the policy entrepreneurs within the Commission who were quick to see that «Lisbon was a method for us» (Gornitzka, 2007). They were the ones who recognised the opportunities the structure offered and who helped to make

<sup>4</sup> Commissioners also ceased to make aggressive comments to the educational world, as recorded by Olsen and Maassen (2007, p. 6).

the connection between the problems, policies and political dynamic (Kingdon, 1995). They were the ones who knew how to put intense multilateralism to work in exploiting the legacy of the European experience and how take advantage of a European political culture ready to invest in institutionalised cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has addressed the issue of the strengths and weaknesses of the Lisbon Model, and its governance by the Open Method of Coordination over the last decade. It has advanced an account of how the Lisbon model has evolved within education and its growing links to other policy areas, notably employment and research. In this concluding section we now set the account of strengths and weaknesses that have been revealed, against what the literature has portrayed.

The education-oriented literature has focussed on the weaknesses of the Lisbon model. These are seen as three fold. One largely concentrates on the ideational diversion of education policy towards neo-liberal ends. A second weakness is the depoliticised nature of the Lisbon policy process. A third is more concrete: the failure of the Lisbon model to attain its targets.

This account concurs that Lisbon's strategic education targets have not been reached, with one exception (the numbers of maths and science teachers). In one case (literacy) attainments are falling. But I, in contrast to some of the commentators, see in this evidence that the Lisbon model for education has a number of strengths. On the evidence here its aspirations cannot be dismissed as neo-liberal. There has been, with one exception, a consistent desire to have a social dimension incorporated alongside a modernising strategy for the economy.

Furthermore in a policy domain where policy-making has often been contentious, OMC has brought a stable process into operation. Education is in a very different position from economic and employment policies where EU legislation has been the norm. For years the policy status of EU education was contested. The Treaty of Maastricht agreement in making education a case for subsidiarity, and not for legislation, set the rules but did

5 See Wallace, Wallace and Pollack (2005) for amplification of this point.



little to generate new attitudes. I see it as a strength that OMC has been introduced to try and do something different, with a focus on the cognitive rather than the legislative.

The institutional consequences for education have had some beneficial effects too – which would not be so apparent in traditional sectors. With strategic policy steered by the European Council, the Council and Commission have been obliged to work together. Such new routines have modified the role of the Commission, so that it has become much more of an energiser of a policy directed by the European Council, rather than an initiator of policy. It has to play a role as the pre-eminent source of expertise, much of it emerging through research contracts, and as a bridge to all member states through bilateral dealings connected with target setting and diffusion.

However what needs to be noted is that this paper is written at a moment of huge institutional upheaval within the EU, as the financial crisis has turned into a banking crisis, a sovereign debt crisis, and for the countries of the south and for regions within countries of the north, an economic crisis. The democratic deficit is an issue that will not go away. If the EU becomes eventually more of a political union there will be spill-over effects for social policy areas, and possibly education. If it does not, and the EU continues to muddle through, democratic issues will still be a source of tension.

In the era of the «great brain race» (Wildavsky, 2010) and an increasingly interdependent world (Hay, 2010), we need to have understood the context for OMC education policy, how the Lisbon model has operated and the continuing debate around its strengths and weaknesses.

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