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In the context of globalization, growing mobility, and increasing social diversity, education in the European Union (EU) plays an important role in encouraging integration, innovation, and fairness. This article looks at how EU education policies, especially those focused on internationalization and inclusion, are changing higher education in EU countries and influencing changes in partner countries like Ukraine. It also considers the historical development of internationalization policies to show how these approaches have evolved over time. By examining key policy documents, academic studies, and major initiatives such as the Erasmus+ programme, the Bologna Process, and the European Universities Initiative, the paper shows how the EU supports cooperation across borders, aligns academic standards, and helps more people, including those from underrepresented groups, access education.

The article pays special attention to how internationalization and inclusion policies have developed and how they are put into practice by universities. It also highlights steps Ukrainian universities are taking to follow EU priorities, such as joining international university alliances, creating joint degree programmes, and improving support for diverse students. It also notes what Ukrainian higher education can borrow from the EU to further improve its own policies and practices. While there has been clear progress, challenges still remain, especially when it comes to fairness in education, better intercultural understanding, and inclusive teaching. By analyzing both the achievements and the challenges in implementing internationalization and inclusion goals, the article seeks to provide insights into the transformative role of EU policy in shaping the future of higher education.

The article concludes that closer ties with EU education policies give Ukrainian universities a good chance to improve the quality of their education and to join a more inclusive, fair, and worldwide academic community that values diversity and encourages cooperation across countries.

Keywords: internationalization; inclusion; EU education policy; Ukrainian universities; higher education reform.

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ОСВІТНЯ ПОЛІТИКА ЄС ТА ЇЇ ВПЛИВ НА ІНТЕРНАЦІОНАЛІЗАЦІЮ ТА ІНКЛЮЗІЮ У ВИЩІЙ ОСВІТІ

У контексті глобалізації, зростання мобільності та соціальної різноманітності освіта в Європейському Союзі (ЄС) дедалі більше розглядається як стратегічний інструмент сприяння інтеграції, інноваціям та соціальній справедливості. У статті проаналізовано, як політика ЄС у сфері освіти, зокрема зосереджена на інтернаціоналізації та

інклюзії, трансформує систему вищої освіти в країнах-членах та впливає на розвиток у партнерських країнах, зокрема в Україні. Також розглядається історичний розвиток політик інтернаціоналізації з метою продемонструвати, як підходи до інтернаціоналізації змінювалися з часом. На основі аналізу ключових документів, наукової літератури та ініціатив, таких як програма Erasmus+, Болонський процес та Ініціатива європейських університетів, продемонстровано, як політика ЄС сприяє транскордонній співпраці, гармонізації освітніх стандартів і розширенню доступу до освіти для інклюзивних груп населення.

Особливу увагу приділено еволюції політик інтернаціоналізації та інклюзії, а також їх реалізації на рівні університетів. Розглянуто приклади залучення українських університетів до пріоритетів ЄС через участь в університетських альянсах, запуск спільних програм подвійних дипломів та покращення підтримки різноманітних студентських спільнот. Окрім того, відзначено особливості, які українська система вищої освіти може запозичити в ЄС з тим, щоб вдосконалити власні освітні політики і практики. Попри очевидний прогрес, все ще існують певні виклики, зокрема забезпечення рівності, міжкультурного порозуміння та інклюзивного викладання. Аналізуючи досягнення і виклики у впровадженні цілей інтернаціоналізації та інклюзії, стаття прагне сформувати уявлення про трансформаційну роль політики ЄС у формуванні майбутнього вищої освіти.

Зроблено висновки про те, що глибша інтеграція з освітньою політикою ЄС відкриває для українських університетів шлях до покращення якості освіти і дає змогу долучитися до формування більш інклюзивного й глобально орієнтованого академічного простору.

Ключові слова: інтернаціоналізація; інклюзія; освітня політика ЄС; українські університети; реформа вищої освіти.

Introduction. In today's world marked by globalization, mobility, and growing societal diversity, the European Union (EU) is considering education as a strategic tool for fostering integration, innovation, and social cohesion. By implementing a range of harmonized policies and programs, among them the Bologna Process, Erasmus+ programme, and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the EU has prioritized internationalization and inclusion as basic principles in its educational strategy. The EU educational policies not only aim to promote academic cooperation across borders, but also to ensure equitable access and participation for students from diverse backgrounds, including those from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

The purpose of the article is to explore the modern EU policies in the educational area while examining their impact on internationalization and inclusion processes in higher education in member states as well as in partner countries, including Ukraine.

Review of the sources. Many scholars and official reports have looked at how EU educational policies shape higher education, especially in terms of internationalization and inclusion. Works by Curaj, Deca, and Pricopie (2018) and De Wit et al. (2015, 2024) explain how European countries have gradually aligned their higher education systems to promote cooperation and diversity. EU Commission documents highlight the importance of equity and support for underrepresented groups. Recent studies on the European Universities Initiative (Brooks & Rensimer, 2023; Gunn, 2020; Grumbinaite et al., 2025) show how universities are working together across borders to create more inclusive learning environments. Finally, research by Dudikova and Marlova (2019) adds a Ukrainian perspective, showing how these policies are adapted locally. Together, these sources provide a solid foundation for understanding the impact of EU policies on making higher education more international and inclusive.

Presentation of the material. Universities have always been involved in international research, teaching, and work with society, but these activities were usually unplanned, disconnected, and more informal than clearly organized or complete. For 70 years, higher education institutions in European countries have consistently worked together to align policies and practices. The most important milestones in the development of EU educational policies include:

- The Erasmus programme (1987), which set the tone for a policy of Europeanization of higher education.

- The Maastricht Treaty (1992), which defined the process of integration of education into the European Union agenda.

- The Bologna Process (1999), which harmonized higher education structures and fostered academic cooperation and exchange [5, 5].

During the 1950s and 1960s, the development of international education was relatively limited by the active development of international education, as the European Community was focused on rebuilding society and the economy after the devastation of World War II. Member states considered education a national responsibility and the differences in educational systems hindered the development of a regional and internationalization policy in higher education. However, international student mobility was present, even though it was limited to inward mobility of degree-seeking students primarily from former British and French colonies.

At this time, the idea of a supranational university in Europe serving as a model institution in research and innovation, and able to compete with United States institutions, emerged. It was envisioned that such a university would align with national priorities while also advancing European culture and scholarship. Later, the idea of a supranational university was taken up by French authorities and included in the Euroatom Treaty. However, the university's role shifted toward

supporting research, innovation, and development in the field of nuclear energy, rather than promoting European cultural integration [5, 6–7].

In 1974, after the EU enlargement, the education ministers of the then member states signed a resolution to form a new Education Committee and agreed to focus on key areas of higher education, such as improving diploma and study period recognition and supporting the mobility of teachers, students, and researchers. The Education Action Program included three educational components: joint study programs, short study visits, and a program for educational administrators, with the first two focusing on international academic cooperation [5, 7].

The following decade marked a period of internationalization and harmonization, with Europeanization and globalization being the primary focuses. Three central changes introduced in the EU educational framework in the 1980s included: an open-door policy for the mobility of individual incoming students, the development of research, and the promotion of student mobility as an integrated part of study programs.

In the 1990s, European education became more open to the rest of the world, in contrast to the 1980s, which were marked by the active development of academic exchange programs but remained primarily focused on Europeanization. New programs were established (TEMPUS, TEMPUS-TACIS) for countries previously behind the Iron Curtain; ALFA for Latin America; the EU-China Higher Education Cooperation Program; and the EU-India Cross-Cultural Program. Since 1995, cooperation programs have also been initiated between the EU, the United States, and Canada.

The most prominent development in education during the 2000–2010 decade was the Bologna Process, which laid the foundation for greater policy convergence among diverse educational systems both within and beyond the EU.

Despite many years of efforts to strengthen international cooperation, the 2010s brought some new challenges to the field of education. These included the emerging digital revolution, growing inequalities in society and related crises, the rise in populist ideologies, the slow recovery of the economic recession and financial crisis of 2008–2012, a cultural backlash, and regional tensions, most notably Brexit. As editors Curaj, Deca, and Precopie noted, the traditional values underlying the EHEA, namely academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation in higher education governance, and public responsibility for higher education, have not received the attention they deserved and were, to some extent, undermined [3, 1; 5, 13].

During the COVID-19 pandemic, academic mobility and exchange slowed down significantly. At the same time, the idea of European Universities as a network of universities offering programmes in which all students study abroad and take courses in at least two

languages came up again. The primary functions of the European Universities are to enhance cross-cultural communication and understanding as well as to promote common European values by bringing together a new generation of Europeans, and to achieve a significant advancement in the quality, performance, appeal, and global competitiveness of European higher education institutions [9, 17–18]. The initiative resulted in 50 alliances comprising 430 institutions from 34 countries, including 30 universities from Ukraine, thereby aligning the European Universities Initiative (EUI) with the goals of the Bologna Process [1, 752].

Despite the European Commission's efforts to promote more balanced participation, such as through mechanisms within the EUI alliances, inequality in cooperation between different regions of Europe persists and may only be resolved over time. At the same time, internationalization remains a pressing issue in education, as it offers opportunities to develop shared solutions to social challenges, particularly those arising from cross-cultural misunderstandings, lack of intercultural competence, and global inequality.

In the contemporary socio-political context, Europe needs to promote its global role and leadership. Under these circumstances, the universities are influential in developing Europe's partnerships with the world and in disseminating European values worldwide. As Europe became a forerunner in collaboration in the field of higher education, many countries and universities were inspired by the European experience in internationalization and interregional cooperation. Working more closely together among European institutions is closely linked to growing their global role. At the same time, it's important to help improve higher education in partner countries.

The “internationalization” term has been actively used since the 1980s and originally belongs to political science and international relations. For the international aspect of education, the terms “international education” and “international cooperation” were used. In the 1990s, internationalization became an object of studies on the institutional level as an internationalization of particular universities capable of providing students with education of an international level – this phenomenon became known as “internationalization” itself, and a set of terms such as “study abroad”, “international students” have gained steam. In the 21st century, the internationalization of higher education is recognized at the international level as a global phenomenon meeting the needs of modern society. The conceptual framework of internationalization and international education is replenished with the following terms: “globalization”, “education without borders”, “cross-border education”, “virtual education” etc.

Extending the definition by J. Knight, H. de Wit defined the internationalization as „the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global

dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” [4, 29].

It is only natural that the internationalization of higher education leads to the involvement of individuals, both students and academic staff, from a wide range of social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. In this context, the concept of inclusion becomes particularly important. Inclusion should be considered not just as a desirable goal, but also as a fundamental prerequisite for the effective and sustainable implementation of internationalization in higher education. Without inclusive policies and practices that give everyone in the academic community an equal opportunity to take part in shared activities and feel a sense of belonging, international cooperation and cross-cultural exchange cannot fully succeed.

In the European Commission document “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions”, diversity, inclusiveness, and gender equality are some of the key priorities for a European strategy for universities. It is worth mentioning that in the “Communication...”, diversity and inclusion are seen as relating not only to students and academic staff from different cultural backgrounds, but also to those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are still “underrepresented in higher education” [2, 2].

Europe offers highly accessible higher education compared to many other parts of the world. At the same time, European education and policies often serve as a kind of golden standard, particularly for Ukraine as it moves toward integration with the European Union. In its attempts to foster diversity and inclusiveness in the higher education area, the EU schedules institutional changes for universities to become places of truly equal opportunities: – design a European framework for diversity and inclusion, identifying university challenges, proposing solutions, and highlighting the needed support from public authorities; – support for researchers at risk providing guiding principles to help universities promote inclusion; – motivate universities in driving institutional change through concrete measures for diversity and inclusion with voluntary inclusion targets and inclusive gender equality plans; – develop national support schemes and expand higher education access for refugees and asylum seekers, including complementary pathways and related support [2, 10].

According to the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, “everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning,” [7] highlighting that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are key priorities of the European higher education agenda. European university alliances are investing efforts into developing DEI strategies, with

82% of them having either developed or currently working on an alliance-level DEI strategy. The most prominent examples of the strategies are those developed by YUFE with its Diversity&Inclusivity strategy, aiming to become leaders in diversity and inclusion, they have supported the creation of dedicated DEI offices in two partner institutions that previously did not have them before joining the alliance; EUTOPIA Inclusion Manifesto, intending to implement the principles of inclusion at the alliance level; the ECIU University’s comprehensive gender equality, diversity, and inclusion plan drawing on the existing plans of partner institutions and includes both an action plan and a governance model [8, 205]. Furthermore, some alliances establish offices, hubs, or academies in charge of implementing the alliance’s DEI strategies. Creating diversity, equality, and inclusion strategies at universities, along with setting up special teams to carry them out, can help bring more inclusivity and diversity to Ukraine’s higher education system.

For the sake of fairness, it is worth noting that Ukrainian universities have already implemented, and continue to implement, EU educational practices, especially in the areas of internationalization and inclusion. For instance, as of 2024, over 30 Ukrainian universities have joined European universities alliances as associated members or full members. Many institutions are actively developing joint and double degree programs with EU partners (Joint Master’s in International Economics and Business, Kyiv National Economic University&University of Koblenz-Landau (Germany); Joint Master’s in Political Science and International Relations, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv&University of Warsaw (Poland); a highly competitive joint Master’s in Social Work with Children and Youth (ESWOCHY) with integrated mobility, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv&Universities from Latvia, Portugal, and Sweden etc.), aligning curricula with European standards. In the area of inclusion, universities are introducing gender equality plans, creating support services for students with disabilities, and launching initiatives to increase access for underrepresented groups, mirroring EU priorities in building a more inclusive and student-centered higher education system. Among these support services are the Inclusive Education Centre of Sumy State University, the Support Centre for Students with Disabilities at Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, the Inclusive Resource Centre at Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, and others.

To move further in line with European practices, Ukrainian universities could benefit from focusing more on intercultural dialogue and inclusive education. This means offering better support for international and minority students, for example, through language courses, buddy systems, and cultural exchange activities. Incorporating intercultural topics into the curriculum

further reinforces inclusive educational practices. Teaching can become more inclusive by using different formats like videos, audio, and subtitles, and by training staff to work with students of different backgrounds and needs. Finally, more flexible learning options, such as prior learning recognition, modular or part-time study formats, and lifelong learning opportunities, would make higher education more accessible for adult learners, and non-traditional students (working professionals, those returning to education, older students).

Conclusions. From the discussion above, the following key points emerge:

1. EU educational policies have played a big role in shaping higher education by encouraging international cooperation and making universities more inclusive. These policies help universities work together and create fair opportunities for all students.

2. Ukrainian universities have made good progress by joining European alliances, offering joint degree programs, and setting up services to support students with different needs. This indicates a progressive alignment with EU standards and a strengthened commitment to internationalization.

3. There is still room to grow, especially in promoting intercultural understanding, using inclusive teaching methods, and offering more flexible study options. These changes would help support minority groups, international students, and those with busy lives.

4. By continuing to adopt EU-inspired reforms, Ukraine's higher education can become stronger, more competitive globally, and better able to contribute to society and innovation in the future.

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“Культура – це те, що людина залишає після того, як вона забула все, чому її навчали”.

Едвард Хол
американський антрополог

“Справжнє порозуміння починається тоді, коли ми слухаємо, а не чекаємо своєї черги говорити”.

Дейл Карнегі
американський письменник

“Освіта – це практика свободи, що дозволяє людині зрозуміти і змінити власну культуру”.

Пауло Фрейре
бразильський педагог

