

Evaluation and Accreditation as policy tools for reformulating the State's role on Higher Education

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Abstract

After the kick-start of the so-called “Bologna Process” (1999) and within the first two decades of its application in Greek Higher Education (from 2005 and thereafter), a series of radical “restructuring” measures of Greek Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) began to unravel. The introduced measures (legislative and other), despite the fact that they have not been based on a structured and open public debate, and on decisions taken by institutionalized, competent and mandatory public authorities, seem to promote the following targets for the Greek HEIs: 1) reduction of public funding, 2) shrinking (qualitative & quantitative) of public HEIs, 3) introduction of private HEIs (something prohibited by the Greek Constitution), and 4) promotion of a “competitiveness” ethos and commodification of the study programs of HEIs. The “glue” that runs through these four targets is the evaluation (the so-called “quality assurance”) and accreditation of HEIs. Through a critical examination of official regulations (laws) and “consultation texts”, both of the respective governments and of institutionalized “independent authorities” that oversee evaluation in HE, we will try to place the various institutional changes within a given spatial-temporal framework (the so-called “socio-historical context”), so that long-term strategies of specific educational policies become apparent, both at the national and international level, especially as regards the European Union (EU) policy for Higher Education and Research. The analysis also stresses issues arising from the globalization of educational policy making and of the homogenization of evaluation practices in HE across the EU, and highlights the role of the Greek “regulatory state” in these developments.

Keyword

Evaluation, accreditation, Greece, Higher Education, Bologna, regulatory state.

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Introduction

In Greece, the massification of Higher Education (HE) throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s served as an education-policy tool for “redistributive” policies. The initial public policy model for HE in the 1980s was primarily driven by socio-political priorities, but gradually, from the 1990s onward, and more markedly during the 2000s, economically oriented objectives such as “innovation”, “competition” and “excellence” became predominant (Oudatzis, 2022; Papadiamantaki, 2020; Pasias, 2020). New legislation, passed in the last 20 years, has challenged the historically high autonomy of HE institutions as regards administrative rules, study programs, evaluation of students and staff, and financial management (Gouvias, 2012a,b).

This paper begins by examining the role of the “regulatory state” in contemporary Capitalism (Gouvias, 2007b; King, 2006, 2007). Then it proceeds by highlighting the globalization of educational policy making, with special reference to the “Bologna Process”. Next, it critically examines texts where political discourse is framed within a rhetoric that propagates the structural reorganization of Greek HE and the creation of the new “Entrepreneurial University” (Datta & Adesola, 2020; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The analysis includes official regulatory documents (Parliamentary Acts) and “consultation texts”, both of the respective governments and of “independent” authorities that oversee evaluation in HE. It also raises issues regarding the globalization of educational policy making and of the homogenization of evaluation practices in HE across the EU, and highlights the role of the Greek regulatory state in these developments.

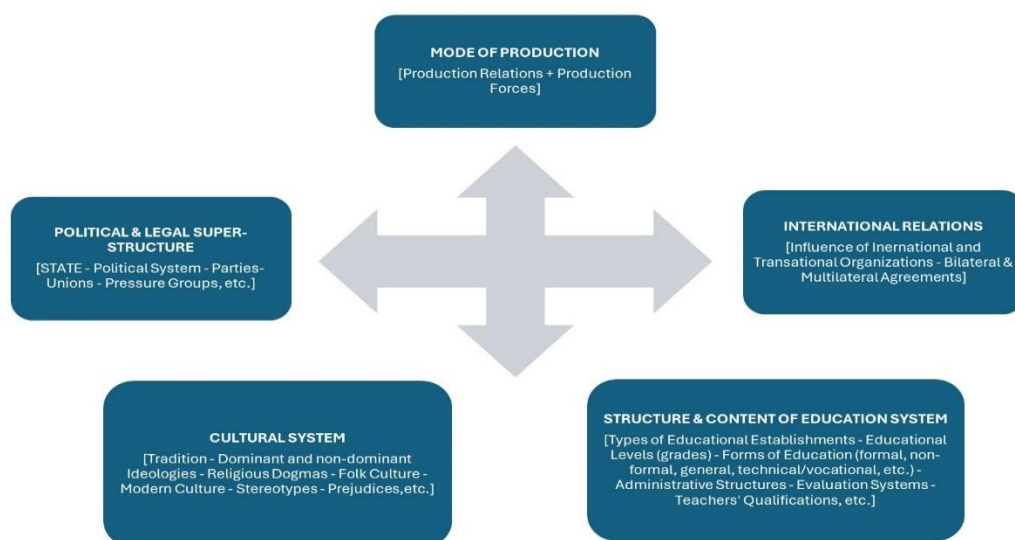
1. The “Regulatory State” and Educational Policy Making – A theoretical framework

According to Poulantzas (1973, 1975), the state in contemporary capitalist societies: a) is relatively “autonomous” from the economic sphere and does not simply “reproduce” the interests of certain classes and political power groups –at least not in a linear way; b) is itself the “product” of struggles, which take place not only along “class” lines, but also through political conflicts and negotiation mechanisms (see also Traianou, 2025). In that sense, the state in contemporary capitalist democracies is restrained by *structural elements* (that is, by its own nature) in *what may or may not do*, and to what extent its

intervention will become “acceptable” without jeopardizing the whole social formation (Gouvias, 2007b; Tsoukalas, 1991; Yeung, 2010).

In order to outline the role of what we call the “regulatory state” (King, 2006, 2007) in educational policy making, especially in HE policy making, we employ an analytic framework proposed by Gouvias & Therianos (2014, chap. 1) and Gouvias (2023, chap. 1), regarding the interplay of various factors that determine the planning, organization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational policy (-ies). More specifically, the framework takes into account: 1) how the *mode of production* shapes educational systems, educational institutions and affects individual educational events; 2) what are the consequences of the *class struggle* and the configuration of social and political forces resulting each time from it, of the distribution of political power and of the way the (capitalist) state is organized; 3) how *tradition and dominant cultural values* (e.g. the emphasis on individualism, combined with the deification of profit) can influence educational institutions and trigger individual educational events; 4) the increasingly intense involvement of *international organizations* or *supranational associations* in the formulation of educational policy; 5) how the existing *structures and institutions of an educational system*, which has the characteristics of a “field” with a high degree of autonomy (Bourdieu, 1988, 1993), respond to changes imposed “from above”. The analytic scheme is presented in Graph 1 below.

Graph 1: Basic Analytical Scheme of the Factors Affecting Educational Policy Making (adopted from Gouvias & Therianos, 2014 and Gouvias, 2023).



2. The global rise of evaluation - Evaluation in the EU

The rise of “evaluation” (also known as “quality assurance”) is the outcome of general political-economic developments at the global level and is inextricably linked to the hegemonic discourse in neoliberal capitalism, which is characterized by a technocratic rationality. It is presented as an “external”, “objective”, based on the final “product” (product-based) evaluation (Neave, 1988). In some parts of the world these changes have appeared in a much more radical way, mainly in educational systems of the so-called “Anglo-Saxon” countries, with particular focus on HE (Apple, 2006; Ball, 1998, 2007; Ball & Youdell, 2008; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Stromquist, 2017; Zapp & Ramirez, 2019).

According to the “Bologna Declaration” (June 1999), the Education ministers who signed it were committed to achieve six objectives, one of which was the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), a crucial element of which was –and still is– the promotion of “European cooperation in quality assurance, with the aim of developing comparable criteria and methodologies” (Bologna Declaration, 1999). At the same time, the objective set by the European Council meeting in Lisbon, in March 2000, was that the European Union (EU) should become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world”, which led to adoption by the EU member states of the so-called “Lisbon Strategy” (EC, 2003; European Council, 2000). This strategy, as the European Commission stated clearly back in 2003, requires the European universities to “foster [...] the coherent, compatible and competitive European Higher Education Area [EHEA] called for by the Bologna Declaration [...]” (EC, 2003, p. 3).

3. Research Questions

In the present work we focus on and utilize texts where the *political discourse* is encapsulated. The examination of key legislation and/or policy documents (laws and their introductory reports) and “consultation texts”, both of the respective governments and of institutionalized “independent authorities” that oversee evaluation in HE in the last twenty years, is crucial in our approach and reveals an evolving *re-construction* and *re-regulation* of HE.

The main research questions are the following:

1. How has the new evaluation and accreditation framework of Greek HE been legally, politically and discursively constructed?

2. What does the emerging evaluation and accreditation framework tell us about the power-balance between the Greek state and the other elements of the educational policy nexus?
3. What does the Greek case reveal about the globalization of educational policy making and the homogenization of evaluation practices in HE?

4. Methodology

The paper focuses on the analysis of the *political discourse for HE* in a time horizon of two decades. The analysis is characterized by a *critical approach*, which emphasizes the ways in which discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimize, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society (see also Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2009).

The types of documents examined are the following:

- Key legislation (i.e. laws and their introductory reports).
- General government policy documents, such as “Green Papers” (papers usually presenting a range of ideas and meant to invite interested individuals or organizations to contribute views and information) and “White Papers” (official sets of proposals that are used as a vehicle for their development into law), which precede the parliamentary approval of a particular legislation.
- Consultation documents put forward by the “independent authority” responsible for HE evaluation and accreditation.

5. Greece and evaluation in HE - The historical context

According to the Greek Constitution of 1975, Higher Education (HE) is provided free of charge and only by state establishments². The HE institutional framework was radically transformed in the early 1980s (Parliamentary Act No 1268/1982, as amended thereafter), whereby universities, after a period of very close state monitoring and a highly bureaucratic and rigid governing structure (in accordance to the conservative and autocratic political climate that dominated the post-war Greece), gained an unprecedented degree of *academic autonomy* (Gouviás, 2012a,b; Papadakis, 2004). More specifically:

² This changed recently (March 2024), when the centre-right government of “New Democracy” (ND), without resorting to constitutional amendment, passed a bill through the Greek Parliament, which allows for the operation of private (i.e. non-state) universities in the Greek territory, only as branches of foreign universities. The new HE establishments would be labelled “University Legal Entities” (ULEs).

- Academic staff members were now elected by all their colleagues, regardless of their rank, rather than solely by full professors, with final approval from the Ministry of Education being a mere formality.
- Significant decision-making authority was, at least in theory, shifted from full professors to the departmental “General Assembly,” which included a considerable number of student representatives.
- Leadership positions in HE, such as rectors and vice-rectors, were chosen by an electoral body where students’ votes held nearly equal weight to those of academic staff.
- The structures and curricula of studies were determined by each department through the decisions made by its collective representation body, namely the so-called “General Assembly”.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, wider transformations at the global level constituted a new environment for the articulation of policies that reflected the needs of global capitalist production and trade in goods and services (including the educational ones) (Held & McGrew, 2000). The Greek state –that is, *the economic and political interests that controlled the state* and were represented in the governments of the time—showed an unequivocal interest on the evaluation and control of the educational system, a key element of which it was –and still is—the teachers themselves³.

Transnational “players” like OECD and the European Commission also published consultation documents (e.g. EC, 1995; OECD, 1996), which paved the way for a *discursive (re)construction of the necessary political climate*. Those documents were stressing the importance of restructuring the Greek educational system –at all levels—in accordance with the “needs” of the labour market(s), raising issues about the “effectiveness” and “efficiency” of HE (Oudatzis, 2022, p. 411).

Throughout the 2000s hundreds of millions of Euros from EU funding started to flow into the country’s state schools and HEIs. New HE departments were established all over the country. As Gouvias (2011) noted, from 1998 until 2006 ninety (90) new departments were established (an increase of 24%, or 10 academic departments per year), most of them initially financed by European money. But that expansion did not come with

³ For more details on the attempted reforms of the educational evaluation system, at primary and secondary level, in the last 50 years (after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974), see Gouvias, 2023, chap. 4; Kalerante et al., 2022; Oudatzis, 2022; Stavrou, 2023; Traianou, 2023, 2025. For relevant reforms at higher (i.e. university) level, see Gouvias, 2023, chap. 4; Kladis et al., 2007; Kyriazis & Asderaki, 2008; Stamelos & Vassilopoulos, 2004.

“no strings attached”. The money would be based on “the creation and application of sets of educational indicators, which should be used in the evaluation of various sub-systems of HE (Gouvias, 2011, p. 396).

6. The Evaluation and Accreditation Framework

6.1 The Introduction of “external evaluation”

According to a Parliamentary Act passed through the Greek Parliament (GMNERA, 2005b) by the right-wing government of “New Democracy” (ND), henceforth there were legal requirements for the construction of indicators reflecting the “quality of HE”. According to the Introductory Report, the “evaluation constitutes [...] the basis for further raising the level of Higher Education [...] and aims at the transparency of the national HE system and at the collection and dissemination of information on HE at national and European level” (GMNERA, 2005a). The 2005 Act required that each HE institution carries out its own *self-evaluation* (internal) and then undergoes an *external evaluation*, which is carried out by a team comprised of various field experts. Self- and external evaluations were expected to be produced at *departmental* and *institutional* (i.e. university-wide) levels (articles 4-9). The evaluation outcomes should be published at *national* level (article 9).

The above Act introduced, for the first time in the history of Greek HE the “Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency”/HQAA (in 2020 renamed to “Hellenic Authority for Higher Education” / HAHE), a national authority which is (formally) independent of both the government and the HE institutions⁴, with a mandate to organize and oversee the evaluation process, while at the same time to prepare and implement valid and reliable “indicators of quality” for all the HE institutions of the country. Among the indicators to be constructed were the following (see HQAA, 2007):

- The degree of response of the Undergraduate Studies Program [...] to the “demands of society”.
- The percentage of compulsory courses and elective courses in the total number of an Undergraduate Studies Program.
- The teacher/student ratio in the various courses.
- How the financial viability of the Postgraduate Study Programs is ensured?

⁴ For a critical and comparative examination of the operation of “independent agencies” in educational policy making in Greece and in the UK, see Gouvias, 2007b.

The “indicators of quality” were widely contested within the HE “field” and raised a number of serious concerns about their clarity (e.g. how one can measure the “degree of response of the Undergraduate Studies to the demands of society?”), their marketization agenda (introduction of fees at post-graduate level, in a country where HE is provided *free of charge at any level*, according to the Constitution), and their lack of validity on purely statistical grounds (e.g., how a Department can be held accountable about its low teacher/student ratio when this is something that is completely out of its control, since the faculty posts are determined each year by the Ministry of Education?) (for more details see Gouvias, 2022).

After a new Green Paper and, subsequently, a White Paper were published in 2006 (GMNERA, 2006; NECCHE, 2006), and circulated to various academic *fora*, causing widespread debates on the restructuring of HE in Greece (Kladis et al., 2007), the government of ND, through another Act of Parliament (GMNERA, 2007) introduced – among other things— measures to restrict prolongation of higher studies beyond a certain time-limit (article 14) and upheld a proposal for a compulsory *four-year economic contract*, agreed between each HEI and the Greek government (i.e. the Ministries of Education, of National Economy and of the Interior).

Additionally, each HEI was required to draft a new *Institutional Charter*, which would be based on a standard one proposed by the Ministry of Education. In that Charter, HEIs would need –among other things— to forecast what other funding sources, *apart from the state budget*, might be included in their respective four-year financial planning. This is another indication of an increasingly interventionist Greek state, which chose to intervene for decreasing “dependency on state funding”, according to the EU rhetoric (EC, 2005, p. 4).

Those changes were heavily resisted both by academic bodies (e.g. individual Senates and the Rectors’ Conference) and the university teachers’ unions, as well as by the major opposition parliamentary parties. A lot of foot-dragging, political negotiation and agitation within the HE sector significantly delayed, postponed or even annulled most of the above legal provisions (for a detailed review of those developments, see Gouvias, 2012a,b, 2020, 2022).

6.2 Intensification of “external evaluation”

The next radical steps towards the creation of a new regulatory framework regarding evaluation was attempted in 2011 by the incoming social-democratic government of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (“PASOK” in Greek), which was also the government that signed in May 2010 the (first out of three) bailout of the country by the EU, the ECB and the IMF (the so-called “Troika”).

Based on previous consultation documents and a fresh “electoral mandate” to overhaul the system of HE, the then Minister of Education presented a Green Paper at the Greek University Rectors’ Conference, in Rethymnon, Crete, on the 23rd of October 2010 (GMNELLRA, 2010). The Green Paper was well received by the university rectors, although they expressed concerns about the (public) funding of HE (given the austerity measures already in place at national level) and the universities’ institutional autonomy (CRPGBHU, 2010).

The ensuing Parliamentary Act of August 2011 (GMNELLRA, 2011) showed clear signs of a radical reorganization of HE institutions across the country (at that time, 23 universities and 16 TEIs in total). The Act paved the way for the *abolition* and/or *amalgamation of existing departments*, or even *whole HE institutions* (see article 7, par. 6).

Another provision of the Act was the mandatory participation of *outsider experts* or *representatives of professional associations and local businesses* in the administrative bodies of the HE establishments (the so-called “Councils”, according to article 8, par. 5), something that would allegedly enhance transparency, social accountability and effectiveness (GMNELLRA, 2010, pp. 7-11). There were also provisions for *a new system of funding for HE*, which would be based on a formula that would include, apart from the traditional indicators (i.e. aggregate numbers of registered students), more detailed and specified indicators of “quality”, such as the number of graduates per year, the amount of external research money acquired, etc. (article 63).

Finally, the Act introduced a new catchword in the academic debates: “accreditation”. More specifically, according to articles 70–72, a new process of “accreditation” (or “academic certification”, as it was labelled) of study programs in HEIs was established, with responsibility of implementation being assigned to the HQAA, through which hundreds of “quality indicators” of HEIs, faculties and/or departments would have to be annually recorded (HQAA, 2012; HAHE, 2022a,b).

The provisions regarding “quality assurance” clearly satisfied the demand made in Bologna for the “[p]romotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies” (EC, 2005, p. 3).

The incoming socialist government of the “Coalition of the Radical Left” (“SYRIZA” in Greek), which, among other things, signed the third bailout of the country (August 2015), despite its party vehement opposition to institutional reforms introduced by previous governments and to the Bologna Process itself (for details see Gouviás, 2018, 2020, 2022), unquestionably endorsed the existing institutional framework, and indeed it reinforced it by setting the legal provisions for the *renaming, splitting up, amalgamation* or even *abolition* of existing departments or whole HE institutions, on the basis of *external evaluation* carried out by two national bodies: the HAHE (see above) and the so-called “National Board of Education and Human Resource Development” (NBEHRD) (GMERRA, 2017, article 5).

The most impressive change that the SYRIZA government brought was a radical overhaul of the existing structure of HE, especially in the year following the passage of Law 4485/2017 (from March 2018 to May 2019). Within approximately fourteen months, the Ministry of Education and Culture succeeded in reducing the number of HEIs from 38 to 24, through the mergers of universities with TEIs, and the establishment of new faculties and departments, in various scientific fields, with no prior consultation with representatives of the Academic Community, and without the necessary feasibility and sustainability studies (see HAHE, 2020, Preface). This restructuring is indicative of recent trends at international level (from China to the United Kingdom) related to the creation of super-universities and research centers, which have the advantage of “economies of scale”⁵.

6.3 The imposition of an “evaluative” culture

Finally, the most far-reaching provisions for the evaluation and accreditation of HE were introduced by the incoming right-wing government in 2019 (again formed by the ND

⁵ See the case of the “federal” University of London, which has absorbed individual HEIs, with great prestige, such as the UCL, the Imperial College, the LSE and the Institute of Education (for global trends from the previous decade, see Curaj et al., 2015).

party). Five major Parliamentary Acts regarding the operation of universities⁶ consolidated the institutional framework for evaluation and accreditation of HE. More specifically, those Acts:

- institutionalized the HAHE (see above), which has a significant advisory role on how the allocation of public (i.e. state) funds to universities is made (see L. 4653/2020, articles, 2, 7, 9, 10, 12, 16, and L. 4957/2022, articles 215, 216, 224). So far, there have been four consecutive academic years during which the new system of funding was implemented (2021-2024).
- established a “Minimum Admission Base” (MAB), that is a minimum scoring threshold (calculated on the basis of average scoring in a specific scientific field), above which students may secure a place at a public HE department, no matter if there are places available or not (L. 4777/2021, article 1). In the first year of its implementation (summer 2021) *40,000 candidates were left out of the university and 16,000 places remained vacant*, especially in the Greek periphery, with many departments accepting up to only 3% of the number of students who would normally be accepted on the basis of the places allocated by the Ministry of Education⁷.
- provided for foreign language study programs for foreigners outside the EU, with tuition fees, partnerships with foreign universities, summer programs, etc. (L. 4692/2020).
- set stricter legal provisions for the renaming, splitting up, amalgamation or even abolition of existing departments or whole HE institutions, on the basis of external evaluation. Contrary to the past, there is *no provision for mandatory agreement of the Senate* of the respective university for the implementation of the above actions by the government (see L. 4957/2022, article 5).
- enforced the so-called “Institutional Councils” (reactivating the relevant provisions of L. 4009/2011), with mandatory participation of outsider experts or representatives of professional associations and local businesses (L. 4957/2022,

⁶ Due to legislation passed in the period March 2018 – May 2019, all HEIs of the country were renamed into “universities”, abolishing that way the old distinction between high-status “universities” and low-status (higher) “Technological Education Institutes” (“TEIs” in Greek) (for details see Gouvias, 2022).

⁷ Indicatively see: <https://www.esos.gr/arhra/74353/skliri-kritiki-apo-toys-proedroys-kai-kosmitores-ton-paidagogikon-tmimaton-kai-sholon>, https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/356935_synodos-paidagogikon-tmimaton-i-ebe-symballei-ston-koinoniko-apokleismo

articles 8, 11, 14). The new Councils have extensive and decisive responsibilities for running the HE institutions (from validating the results for the elections for Rectors, to approving the annual university budget).

- cultivated the commodification of academic work by acknowledging as a crucial criterion for the faculty's tenure the "participation in spin-off companies", or by allowing university teachers (tenured or not) to be employed in a variety of private ("non-profit") research institutions and to hold unlimited part-time posts in other public universities (L. 4957/2022, articles 143, 158, 159).
- created new types of academic contracts (part-time fixed-term and project-assignment contracts), which may only be funded by "external sources" (national international, public or private, NGOs, no-profit trusts, etc.) (L. 4957/2022, articles 166-175).
- created new types of studies (short-cycle degrees, major-minor degrees, part-time studies, internal-mobility schemes, etc. (L. 4957/2022, articles 70-78).

The HAHE is assuming an increasingly important role for financing HE, especially as far as the distribution of public money is concerned. In its last three annual reports this "independent" authority stressed the minor increase in public funding of HE, while also highlighted the increasing importance of the "quality indicators" (average publications in peer reviewed journals per faculty member, citations per publication, participation in externally funded research projects, etc.) for the distribution of public money (20% of the total) (see HAHE, 2021, 2022a, 2024, 2025c).

The most recent Parliamentary Act (L. 5094/2024), permits –despite the strict constitutional prohibition— the *operation of private universities* in the country, a move that will purportedly promote competition and accountability among HE institutions, enhance the "freedom of choice" for the Greek families, ease the financial burden of those who send their offspring to study abroad due to limited available places in the state universities, and combat this way the "brain drain" (see GMERAS, 2024a, p. 135). The ideological commitment of the "New Democracy" party to the promotion of private universities was clear already in the 2019 elections (see New Democracy, 2019, chap. 11), and later on in the 2023 elections, when it emphasized the need to revise article 16 of the Greek Constitution, which prohibits the operation of private universities in Greece, and characterized it as "outdated" and "anachronistic" (New Democracy, 2023, p. 20). The Parliamentary Act was voted in by the Greek Parliamentary majority on the 8th of March 2024 (L. 5094/2024).

The passing of the new Act created a hot debate both within the academic community, and the political system as a total. The government defended the legislative initiative, saying that it is not contrary to the Constitution, since the law will allow the operation of “branches of foreign universities” and not the establishment of new private universities (the official name is “Legal Entities of University Education” / LEUE). It also emphasized that the Constitution is not something “static”, and its provisions must be interpreted dynamically in order to adapt to modern changing economic, social and scientific developments (see GMERAS, 2024a, pp. 130-133).

The opposition parties (especially the left-wing ones) expressed –before and after the parliamentary debates—concerns about the unconstitutionality of the new Bill.⁸ The Rectors’ Conference did not raise any significant opposition to the upcoming legal framework, neither in its meeting in December 2023, nor in its meeting in April 2024⁹.

The Federation of the University Teachers’ Unions harshly criticized the new Bill as “unconstitutional” and called on the government to withdraw it (PFATRS, 2024). In November 2024, the Governing Board of the Federation decided to appeal to the Council of State (highest administrative court) for the annulment of the provisions of L. 5094/2024¹⁰. The same stance was followed by the vast majority of the academic teachers’ unions¹¹. Additionally, numerous students’ unions vehemently reacted to the prospect of submitting the new Bill to the Greek parliament, with mass protests, public marches, sit-ins and quite often disruptions of the operation of institutional bodies¹².

⁸ More details about it see here: https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/boyli/423992_aposyrsi-toy-n/s-gia-ta-idiotika-aei-zitaei-i-antipoliteysi, <https://www.in.gr/2024/02/27/politics/vouli-antipoliteysi-zitei-tin-aposyrsi-tou-nomosxediou-gia-ta-idiotika-aei-ti-apantise-o-pierrakakis#!pid=webtv3>, <https://www.ethnos.gr/paideia/article/304799/idiotikapanepesthmiahxhrooxiapoantipoliteyshneoyksaiaei5shmeiaamfisbhtshs>

⁹ More info about this, see at: <https://synodos-aei.gr/gr/conferences/>

¹⁰ The first hearing on this appeal took place in April 2025. For details on the appeal see here: <https://www.esos.gr/arthra/90660/posdep-prosfeygoyme-sto-ste-kata-toy-nomoy-gia-ta-mi-kratika-panepistimia>, <https://www.news247.gr/ellada/posdep-o-nomos-gia-ta-mi-kratika-panepistimia-einai-antisintagmatikos/>, <https://www.esos.gr/arthra/92849/apo-mikroskopio-ton-anotaton-dikaston-o-nomos-pierrakaki-gia-ta-mi-kratika>

¹¹ For more details visit: <https://www.posdep.gr>

¹² For more details visit: https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/438721_apofasi-syntonistikoy-genikon-syneleyseon-kai-katalipseon-ton-fs, <https://www.newsbreak.gr/ellada/548700/idiotika-panepistimia-stoys-dromoys-oi-sylogoi-foititon-kai-mathiton-stis-11-ianovarioy/>, <https://www.902.gr/eidisi/neolaia-paideia/358015/pano-apo-195-foititikoi-sylogoi-sto-panelladiko-syllalirio-enantia>,

7. Discussion – Conclusions

The critical examination of official regulations and “consultation texts”, both of the respective governments and of the “independent authorities” that oversee evaluation in Greek HE, allows us to place the various institutional changes concerning evaluation and accreditation within a given spatial-temporal framework. In the limited space available, we will try to summarize the main findings of our analysis, according to the research questions posed earlier in the paper.

1. How has the new evaluation and accreditation framework of Greek HE been legally, politically and discursively constructed?

Successive Greek governments since the early 2000s, when the Bologna process was underway, have attempted to introduce a new system of evaluation and accreditation of HEIs. The new system was based on the “quality assurance policies” which are a central policy pillar of the EHEA, part of the common European Education Policy (Stamelos & Vasilopoulos, 2004). The evaluation processes, which started in 2005 and formally complied to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs), contained demands for a multitude of data that had never been recorded in Greek HE until now. Thus, although the first law on evaluation and certification was introduced in 2005, it took many years for evaluations of HEIs to gradually be completed (Papadiamantaki, 2020).

The obstacles to the implementation of the relevant legislation (especially in the early years of its implementation) had to do with both economic factors (low levels of funding of HE) and organizational factors (bureaucracy, ambiguity, lack of procedures and responsibilities, organizational culture, etc.), as well as political factors (reactions of political parties, trade unions and students’ union, etc.). Also significant was the reaction of participants in the “field” (in bourdieusian terms) of university education to proposals that were perceived as an unprecedented state intervention in the self-government of universities (Gouvias, 2012b).

However, the demands for evaluation and accreditation of universities became increasingly pressing, with the adoption of more intense rhetoric from successive governments, whether social democratic or center-right, at an impressively rapid rate during the times of economic austerity imposed on the Greek people in the early 2010s, when public funding fell dramatically and Greek universities had to compete for ever-decreasing resources at either national or European level (Gouvias, 2022). In other words, even in an economy that has been a member state of the European Union for decades,

targeted political and legislative initiatives were needed in order for the country to keep pace with the way HE operates in other countries of the EU (e.g. the introduction of fees, the marketization of HEIs and, finally, the setting up of private universities).

Very interesting is the new discourse that is slowly being built through the legislative texts or consultation texts of successive Greek governments; a discourse that is increasingly being dominated by concepts such as “competition”, “excellence”, “internationalisation”, “external evaluation”, “accreditation”, “accountability”, “choice”, “private resources”, “sponsorship”, “tuition fees”, “indicators”, “educational services”, and the like (see also Pasiás, 2020). This new discourse has become hegemonic in recent years, especially through the legislative initiatives taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, when even democratic participation processes in universities were carried out through teleconferences, televoting and application of a number of digital services available on and through various on-line platforms (e.g. the increasing adoption of digital signatures).

2. What does the emerging evaluation and accreditation framework tell us about the power-balance between the Greek state and the other elements of the educational policy nexus?

The Greek state seems to be reacting—though not without resistance and internal inconsistencies—to worldwide changes in capitalist production, which has seen major transformations in recent decades and now faces a financial, fiscal and labor-market crisis, which worsens social inequality (Lapavistas, 2013; Piketty, 2013). By capitalizing on its powerful role within Greek society (see Graph 1), and by assertively engaging all its branches (legislative, executive, and judiciary), the regulatory state has prioritized radical reforms in the HE sector.

Within this context, the influence of traditional factors that once played a decisive role in Greek HE appears to be diminishing, while new factors are gaining prominence. Official texts (either by the government, or the HAHE) place an increasing emphasis on the needs of the “business community” (see the “Mode of Production” box in Graph 1). This group also includes individual entrepreneurs of post-secondary educational institutions who demand *de jure* and *de facto* recognition of their graduates’ professional rights at levels comparable to public university graduates (classified as ISCED 5+), despite this being constitutionally prohibited. Recent research on “policy networks” (Kavasakalis, 2015; Samara, 2019) shows that in recent decades non-institutional “educational governance” networks have emerged within the centralized Greek education system. These networks leverage “social capital,” mainly through their graduates holding

influential political or social positions, to influence policymaking processes by intervening in government circles (see Samara, 2019, p. 277).

Academic staff, due to the broader political and economic changes of the last two decades, has seen their role substantially weakened by the rise of the regulatory state (Gouvias, 2007a,b, 2018). Despite attempts to oppose reforms through activism and legal challenges to government legislation between 2011 and 2015, the Greek government's capitulation to the demands of the "Troika" in 2015, combined with the failure of radical reform efforts and the disillusionment of many academics since then, has greatly diminished the likelihood of meaningful opposition to subsequent government initiatives (Gouvias, 2020).

3. What does the Greek case reveal about the globalization of educational policy making and the homogenization of evaluation practices in HE?

In an era marked by the globalization (or "internationalization") of educational policymaking and "isomorphism" (Zapp & Ramirez, 2019), the widespread rise of evaluation and accreditation in HE has become a global norm. The Greek state is beginning to align with developments observed in other European countries, aiming to develop a HE system that is more attuned to "markets"—both labor and capital markets. The highly centralized Greek state (i.e. the political and economic interests that manipulate its mechanisms) is increasingly adopting an interventionist stance, transforming itself into a new type of "regulatory state".

In Greece, delays in implementing the aforementioned reforms and the "emergent" nature of legislation enacted over the past five years, have been influenced by a complex interplay of factors. These range from macro-level conditions to meso- and micro-level factors, including institutional frameworks within HE, government initiatives, interest-group demands and resources, intra-institutional dynamics, personal traits of key policymakers (Gouvias, 2020, 2022), and unpredictable events like the outbreak of the pandemic. This suggests that, despite the strong global trends toward homogenization, the actual process of implementing educational reforms at the national level remains highly dynamic, unpredictable, and influenced by multiple "actors", interacting at multiple levels.

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