



## **What paths, whose responsibility? 2023 CE: the Future of European Higher Education**

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**The way forward:**  
**Exploring the paths towards the future of European Higher Education**



# Questions/analysis

Is there a European future for higher education?

What does that mean?

Who decides “how future happens” in higher education?


*In general – and today: a practical approach*

What the analysis shows:  
a major challenge for higher education  
institutions in Europe – we don't decide

Lack of strategic autonomy – no  
right/possibility to decide on the  
direction of travel as an institution.

- Is it different in other parts of the world? Is it different for different HEIs in the same country?
- Does it matter?
- Is it true?
- What about other dimensions of autonomy?





# Who decides? “How the future happens”

- External forces decisive regarding the direction of work
- Universities' attitude
  - Resistance/ignoring
  - embracing
  - “comply and lament”



# External forces

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- Public authorities decisions/policies/initiatives
- Social, economic, political (geopolitical) developments
- Powerful “public narratives”

In recent history – and today



# Public authorities decisions/policies/initiatives about higher education

In the past	At work today or coming up soon (in Europe)
GI Bill	
Bologna Process	
European University Initiative (“internationalization by integration model”)	
	<a href="#">EHEA fundamental values project</a>
EU initiatives in HE (e.g. under Lisbon Strategy)	EU current initiatives

- Democracy or not – does it matter?
- National, international, supra-national –in Europe.
- What works what doesn’t.
- Embrace or resist –does it change anything?
- Universities not present?

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# President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill), Oval Office, June 22, 1944.



# TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE



HARVARD'S JAMES BRYANT CONANT

"A scholar's activities should have relevance."

(Education)

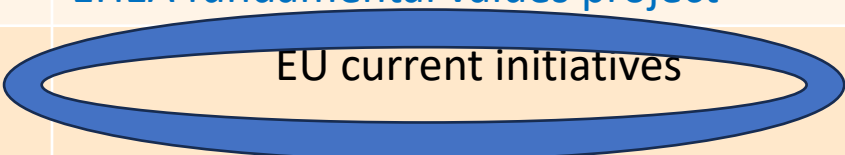
J.B Conant  
Harvard President  
1933-1953

*Robert M. Hutchins, president of the  
University of Chicago:*

*"colleges and universities will find themselves  
converted into educational hobo jungles. ...  
Education is not a device for coping with mass  
unemployment."*

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# Social, economic, political (geopolitical) developments

In recent past	At work today (affecting Europe)
Fall of Iron Curtain/Berlin Wall	New “Iron Veil”; War in Ukraine; “Competition” with China
European Enlargement/Integration	Brexit; stalling of European (Union) Project
Great Recession 2007-2009	
Covid 19 pandemic	
Ascendence of populisms	
New uses of technology	Even newer uses of technology

- National, international, supra-national – ex. HEIs in the UK, Hungary
- “Coming upon us”, again?
- Long-term/major impacts

# Powerful “public narratives”

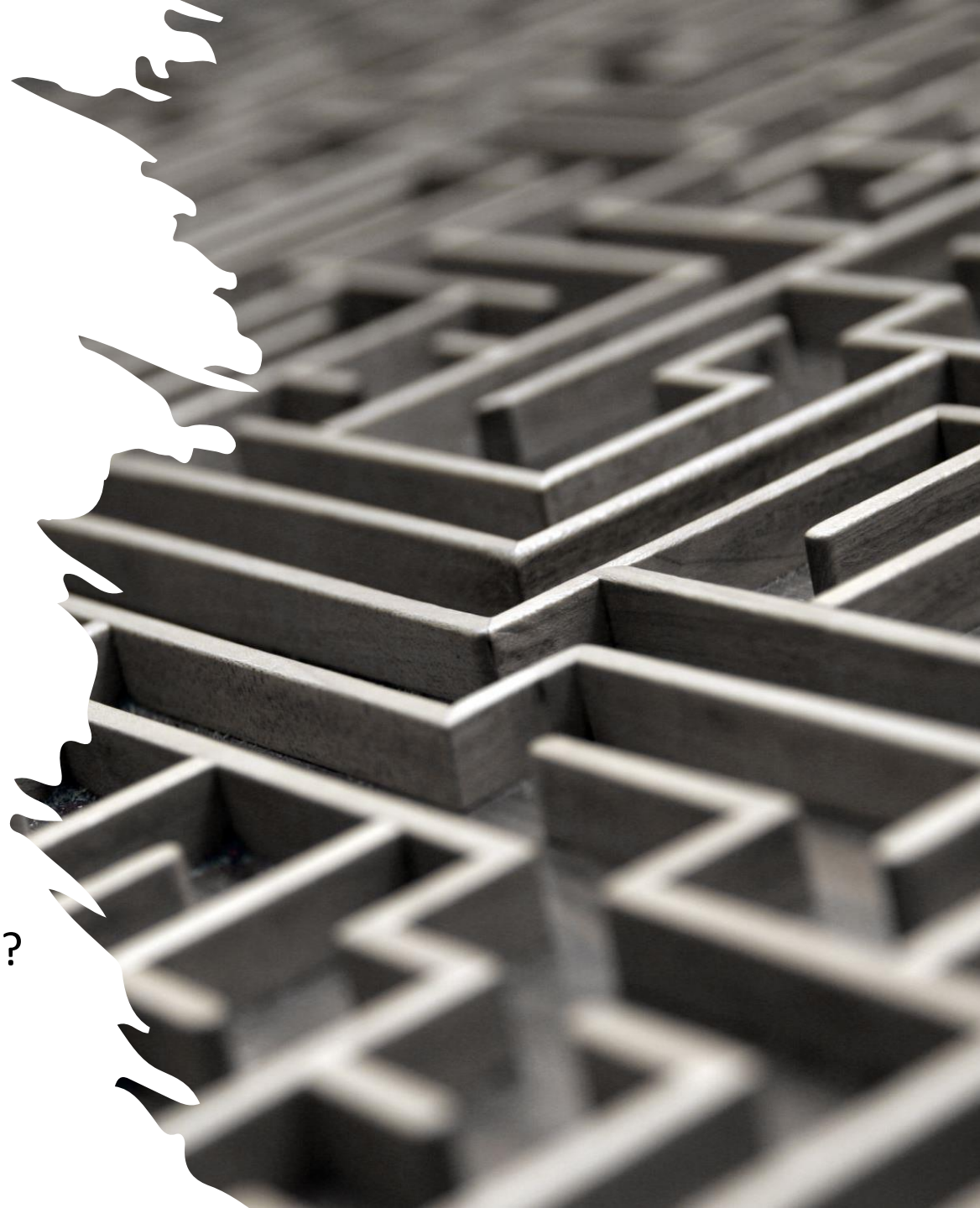
In the past	At work today (affecting Europe)
Massification	End of massification (“de-massification”?)
Knowledge society + neoliberalism	?
Broad internationalization	Restricted internationalization
(Open society	Nationalism, authoritarianism, “tribalism”)

- Too powerful to resist?



# What paths –whose responsibilities?

- Universities (university leadership) have a responsibility to decide on paths for the future, but very limited latitude, if any, to do so.
- How to address this conundrum, as a university leader?
- How to address it today, thinking of the concrete “external forces” that push university towards or away from a “European future”.
- What is the European future? Need to position as an institution –but is that possible?
- How to decide, at the university level what is this future?
- Comply (and lament)?






## All good? All bad?

- External pressure on direction is not all or always bad, quite the contrary (see GI Bill, for example).
- Autonomy is real in many European countries (specific dimensions).
- There is some realization regarding the need to think about, revendicate and practice strategic autonomy (not in the EU sense) – see the Monitoring Mechanism for the Fundamental Values of Higher Education (first explicit mention of “autotomy of direction”).





# Back to the main questions?

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- Can we “build” the future in higher education? Do we want to?
  - Including a European future?
  - What exact paths?
  - Whose decisions?
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- What is the place of HEIs and their leaders in all this?
  - (What are fora for shared reflection and action in this regard)?





**"WE SHALL  
OVERCOME"**

"WE SHALL OVERCOME"

Barack Obama