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Abstract

The paper locates the past two decades of changes in Polish universities in a comparative European context. It shows a wider transition: from an expanding, privatized and disciplinarily divided university of the 1990s to a publicly funded, increasingly contracting and stratified university of the 2000s (and beyond). The gradual political and economic integration of Poland with the European Union has been accompanied by the gradual integration of the Polish higher education system with Western European systems. The paper argues that the major emergent parameter of higher education policy is demographics and that the remonopolization of the system by the tax-based public sector and the gradual decline of the private sector are transforming the system beyond recognition. Processes of ?de-privatization? or ?re-publicization? are gradually replacing recent processes of ?privatization?. Powerful systemic changes in university governance and funding modes are bound to shatter the relative stability of the academic profession. After two decades of being fundamentally different due

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to the communist legacy (i.e. being ?post-communist?), selected Polish universities, owing to accelerating processes of academic stratification linked to the 2009?2012 wave of reforms, have a chance to become fully blown elements of a European knowledge production landscape, with increasingly similar governance and funding regimes and the similarly research-involved academic profession. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)