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Bologna Process, Europeanization and Turkish Higher Education: A Research from the Field

Bologna Süreci, Avrupalılařma ve Türk Yüksek Öğretimi: Bir Alan Arařtırması

ABSTRACT

The 1990s were the years that Europe witnessed very dynamic and also turbulent times. Transition in the Eastern Europe paved the way for reunification of Europe in political, economic and cultural domains. Education, and higher education in particular, has been perceived as one of the most suitable means for creating a common European identity. Cooperation among European universities has long been promoted as a part of the European cultural project to develop the understanding of a European identity among the young generations. Bologna Process is the outcome of this political will declared in 1999 and aimed at creating a common European Higher Education Area and European Research Area. There have been significant changes in higher education systems of the member countries since then. Yet, after nearly two decades from its launch, the process is being questioned by many and higher education community deeply divided over the philosophy of Bologna. Turkey, as a member of the process since 2001, has also employed Bologna reforms for restructuring its higher education system and for accelerating the integration with the Western world. Turkish universities successfully implemented many of the structural reforms, yet the substance of the regulations and contribution of the process in creating a common European identity among the scholars are questionable. This paper focuses on these issues and reflects the views from the field by presenting findings of a survey carried out with research assistants in a Turkish state university. The survey was carried out in 2017 with the participation of 145 research assistants working in 10 faculties in Suleyman Demirel University. Major findings reveal that research assistants have little information on the process. Most of them think that the primary aim of Bologna process is to create a European identity, yet it is hard to talk about such an identity at the moment. In addition, research assistants do not perceive Turkish higher education and researchers as a part of European higher education area. On the other hand they do not think Bologna process as a threat to national identity. As for the implementation of Bologna process, it is seen as a bureaucratic process increasing the workload of academics which lacks democratic participation.

Keywords: Bologna Process, Europeanization, European Identity, Turkish Higher Education.

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ÖZET

1990'lı yıllar Avrupa'da siyasi olarak dinamik ancak çalkantılı yıllar olmuştur. Doğu Avrupa ülkelerinde yaşanan geçiş süreci Avrupa'nın siyasi, ekonomik ve kültürel olarak yeniden birleşmesini gündeme getirmiştir. Bu bağlamda eğitim ve özellikle yükseköğretim ortak bir Avrupa kimliği yaratmak için en uygun alanlardan biri olarak görülmüş, Avrupa kimliğinin oluşturulmasında üniversiteler arasındaki etkileşim önemli bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır. Ortak bir Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı ve Avrupa Araştırma Alanı kurmayı hedefleyen ve 1999 yılında yaşama geçirilen Bologna süreci bu siyasi yaklaşımın bir sonucudur. Bologna süreci kapsamında birçok ülkenin yükseköğretim sisteminde önemli reformlar gerçekleştirilmektedir. Ancak, Bologna süreci birçok kişi tarafından farklı yönlerden eleştirilmekte, akademik camiada sürecin felsefesi üzerinde keskin ayrımlar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Türkiye de 2001 yılından itibaren Bologna süreci üyelerinden biri olarak yükseköğretim sisteminde yeniden yapılanma ve Batı dünyası ile entegrasyon kapsamında reformları uygulamaktadır. Türk üniversiteleri birçok yapısal reformu başarıyla uygulamakla birlikte reformların içeriği ve Avrupa kimliğinin oluşumuna katkısı açısından soru işaretleri doğmaktadır. Bu çalışmada söz konusu tartışılmalı alanlar ele alınmakta ve Türkiye'de Bologna sürecinin işleyişine ilişkin bir araştırmanın bulguları paylaşılmaktadır. Araştırma Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi'nde 2017 yılında 145 araştırma görevlisi ile gerçekleştirilen bir anket çalışmasını kapsamaktadır. Ana bulgular öncelikle araştırma görevlilerinin Bologna süreci hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadıklarını göstermiştir. Katılımcıların büyük bölümü Bologna sürecinin temel olarak ortak bir Avrupa kimliği oluşturma amacını taşıdığını, ancak henüz böyle bir ortak kimlikten bahsetmenin olanaklı olmadığını düşünmektedir. Benzer şekilde, katılımcılar Türk yükseköğretimini ve araştırmacılarını Avrupa Yükseköğretim alanının bir parçası olarak görmemektedir. Öte yandan, Bologna süreci ulusal kimliğimize bir tehdit olarak algılanmamaktadır. Araştırma görevlileri Bologna reformlarının uygulanmasını ise bürokratik ve aşırı işyükü yaratan bir süreç olarak görmekte, demokratik katılımın yetersizliğine vurgu yapmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bologna Süreci, Avrupalılaştırma, Avrupa Kimliği, Türk Yükseköğretimi.

Introduction

"Europe can only be realized in the mirror of Others... So if Europe does not exist without non-Europe, and non-Europe does not exist without Europe, the great challenge is how to make this the starting point for bridge-building, not for demarcation" (Strath, 2002, p. 397).

The 1990s were the years that Europe witnessed very dynamic and also turbulent times. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall Eastern European countries experienced fundamental political transformations which had significant affects for the rest of the continent. Transition in the Eastern Europe paved the way for reunification of Europe in political, economic and cultural domains. The Maastricht Treaty of 1993 signaled this consensus and drew the broad lines of the reunification through widening and deepening of the EU. Deepening meant that the Europe was not defined merely by geographical borders, it was a cultural entity, as well. It began to shine in a new light "it is one and it is diverse, diversity being as richness". Yet, this value has also been understood differently throughout the continent and acceptance of Europe as a symbolic entity has again opened the discussion on European identity (Zgaga, 2009, p. 175).

The European integration project has always been a turbulent process with debates and objections from politicians, academicians and ordinary people. There have been two sides of the debate; federalists have favored a supranational federation while Eurosceptics have opposed the idea of a federal Europe in the sense of a federation that is as integrated as the United States of America. For federalists integration process would and should eventually form a supranational federation. "United States of Europe", a new political community with its own demos. The outcome of this process would be a collective European identity (Luhman, 2015, p. 1).

Education and higher education in particular, has been perceived as one of the most

suitable means for creating such a common identity. Jean Monnet activities, educational programmes, academic mobility programmes, European studies centres etc. have played important role in the dissemination of a European integration ideas and politics. Bologna Process is the most extensive higher education project in this sense. The Bologna Declaration which initiated the Bologna Process was signed in 1999 by 21 states, both EU members and non -EU states and aimed at creating a common European higher education area (EHEA) and European research area (ERA). Today all members of the Council of Europe have signed the agreement (48 states), both EU and non- EU members.

While the process was initiated with an intergovernmental approach, its discourse focused on common European values and a common European identity. Yet, after nearly two decades from its launch, the process is being questioned by many including the academics and students. Whether there could be a common identity of a higher education area comprising 48 states and thousands of universities has been debated in both inside and outside of Europe. On the political side, the creation of European citizenship, seems to be slipping into the distance given the ensuing political tensions and emergency of a massive refugee crisis. On the educational side, it is apparent that the process is already insufficient to provide adequate solutions to the emerging challenges of the new and increasingly globalized environment (Hunter& de Wit, 2016: p. 4). The higher education community is deeply divided over the philosophy of 'Bologna'. It seems that the Bologna reforms are widely perceived as a top-down process implemented in an authoritarian manner and infringed academic freedom (Rudder, 2010, p. 9). It might not be wrong to conclude that the Bologna Process has lost its momentum in recent years.

Turkey, which is a candidate country for full membership in the EU, became a member of the Bologna process in 2001 and Turkish higher education has witnessed significant changes since then. In fact, the main driving force behind Turkish higher education policies has long been integration with the Western world. The primary actor in the implementation of the Bologna reforms is the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) which is a national body with extensive authority over universities. Turkish universities have implemented many important regulations in accordance with the Bologna process, yet these changes remained as bureaucratic and technical issues due to the lack of participation. In a sense, there is a democratic deficit in the implementation of the process.

In this context, the objective of this paper is to explore the implementation of the Bologna Process in Turkey from the perspective of academics. To this end, the research assistants working in a state university were selected as the sample group, since they are primarily in charge of the implementation of the Bologna process in the universities. A survey was carried out in Suleyman Demirel University in 2017 with the participation of 145 research assistants employed in 10 faculties of the university. Survey included questions for exploring the views of the researchers on the definition of Bologna process, its implementation and the link with the European identity. In this framework, first section of the paper discussed the Bologna Process within the context of European identity. In the second section, implementation of the process in Turkey was examined

including the critical views. Then, the findings of the survey were presented and discussed.

1- European Identity and The Bologna Process

As Dale and Robertson (2009) argued, a single view of Europe and what it means to be 'European' is lacking both in politics and in the minds of the people. One of the most employed perspectives on defining European identity concentrates on its borders and the debate over the geographical boundaries of Europe. Whether Europe denotes to the "EU" and what is the geographical boundaries of Europe has been debated.

The notion that borders are not simply geographical lines has been supported by many. For instance it is argued that the idea of borders is a typical way of conventional thinking about Europe. Yet, Europe is 'a space of meaning', rather than 'merely a place' (Lawn and Grek, 2012, p. 13). For Eder (2006, p. 68) borders could be seen both as 'hard' and 'soft' lines at the same time. They are hard because, obviously, they are demarcated on a map. They are also soft because they are borders between people – borders that are imagined, negotiated and, thus, socially constructed. Eder argued that both aspects of bordering interact because there is a two-way process 'from boundaries to identity and back to the real borders'.

A specific example of the content of this debate is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP, issued in 2004, aimed at developing relations with the neighbouring countries of the enlarged EU on the basis of the prosperity, stability and security of all to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines. The policy was based on the values of democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights (EEAS, 2014). In this strategy, the EU and its neighbouring countries are perceived as a cultural entity based on common political and economic objectives and shared values.

Besides the debate on what constitutes the boundaries of Europe, European identity has also been debated inside the EU. European Union as a political project has been punctuated with moments of discussion and crisis alongside the borders of national identities. The Project has been criticised for being a "top-down" process imposed by the leaders for manufacturing and legitimizing a European identity (Laffan, 1996, p. 96).

The outcome of the British referendum on European Union (EU) membership, called later the Brexit vote, sent shockwaves through Europe¹. The outcome of the Brexit is unique in the sense that no other member states voted such a decision to date. But, on the other hand, the factors that brought about the outcome of the referendum are by no means a distinctively British phenomenon, the anti-immigration and anti-establishment sentiments are gaining strength across Europe. Thus, the problem is not only the loss of a member state, but also the symbolic reflection of the resentment throughout the continent. The EU is no more perceived as a solution to the problems of globalized and integrated world which challenges the national identity and daily life of ordinary people. Rather the EU enlargement and deepening process has been seen as a part of the problem

¹ For more information on the Brexit please see Todd, 2016; Hobolt, 2016; Vasilopoulou, 2016; Irwin, 2015.

particularly by the people with stronger national identity (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1259).

The exit of a member state from the EU is unprecedented, and it has political and economic consequences for both Britain and the EU as a whole. Whereas Euroskepticism in Britain has always been strong since the beginning of the EU project, the referendum can not be just left aside as a result of British exceptionalism. There has been a move away from the 'permissive consensus' of the early period of integration towards a period where the EU is an increasingly contested and politicized issue in the domestic political arena in most of the European states. The challenge for the EU is now to find a way of addressing the concerns of the many citizens who feel that their distinct national identity and culture is under threat from immigration and European integration (Hobolt, 2016, p.1273). Thus, the questions on the European identity have been getting stronger than ever before.

In addition to critical voices within the Union, there are also critics from outside about the concept of a unique European identity based on 'heritage and history' which reveals ethnocentrism (Shore, 1996). Yet, integrationists argue that the European Union does not place European identity over national identities, rather it respects for diversities through 'unity-in-diversity' approach (Pantel, 1999, p. 47). In this context, education and particularly higher education has been perceived as one of the most promising areas for promoting this approach.

Cooperation among European universities has long been promoted as a part of the European cultural project to develop the understanding of a European identity among the young generations. Not only the member states of the Union but also the signatory countries of the European Cultural Convention that together constitute the membership of the Council of Europe have taken part in this cooperation. Bologna Process is the outcome of this political will which aimed at creating a common European higher education area (EHEA) and European research area (ERA) as the new paradigm. Indeed, beginning of the Bologna Process could be traced back to an event which took place eleven years before the Bologna Declaration was signed. In 1988 the university rectors who gathered in Bologna to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna signed the Magna Charta of European Universities (MCU, 1988) on 18 September. The declaration was announcing the fundamental principles and focusing on the cultural values and intellectual freedom as the cornerstone of European universities (Tomusk, 2004, p. 79).

This understanding was announced in the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU, 1988) as following:

The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.

Ten years later, a meeting of the education ministers of Germany, France, Italy and the UK in Sorbonne, France, produced the joint Sorbonne Declaration (Sorbonne, 1998).

In this declaration higher education was seen as a part of the European integration accelerated in the 1990s and all European universities were called for joining in their objective to consolidate Europe's standing in the world through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens. As an expression of this perspective the declaration noted that Europe is "not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well". The main stress in this document is on the creation of a common cultural Europe by means of student mobility, and a few technical instruments such as recognition of degrees and credit transfer (Tomusk, 2004, p. 80).

Signing the Bologna Declaration a year later was the next step. The Bologna Declaration which initiated the Bologna Process was signed in 1999 by 21 states, both EU members and non-EU states. Today all members of the Council of Europe have signed the agreement (48 states), both EU and non-EU members, all create the European Higher Education Area. The agreement was signed as a commitment to create an "open space with common references in terms of learning structure, credit use, quality evaluation, curricular development and the mobility of people and ideas. The initial aims of the Bologna Process were: the promotions of mobility and employability of citizens and international competitiveness of the European higher education system. According to the Bologna Declaration, these aims would be achieved by the harmonization of higher education systems (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

Bologna Process initially aimed at shaping the new Europe through higher education where common European values and a common European identity are developed. Thus, 'European values' seemed to be a foundation of European identity. European values are discussed in the Bologna Process documents with regard to the ideas of democracy, freedom, 'belonging to a common social and cultural space', and respect for diversity (Bologna Declaration, 1999: 1). Another European value of the Bologna Process is the geopolitical status of Europe that seeks both to respect everyone beyond its borders and support everyone within its borders (Prague Communiqué, 2001).

As a signal of the respect for diverse national policies and identities, the process was constructed with an intergovernmental approach based on the voluntary convergence of national higher education systems. Initially the European Union was not a part of the Bologna Process. Yet shortly after its launch, the process was quickly taken under the auspices of the European Union and the European Commission gradually increased its role through its economic resources and began to take the lead as a substitute for lacking political mandate (Tomusk, 2004: 80). 'Bologna cannot be implemented à la carte', declared Vivienne Reding, the European Commissioner responsible for Education and Culture, in her address to the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, who on 17-19 September 2003 gathered in Berlin to discuss the progress made in implementing the so-called Bologna Process (Reding, 2003).

Thus, although the Bologna Process signatory countries are not only the EU member states, it is gradually began to be conceived as an EU Process both internally and externally. The EU's expanding role in the process signals the two-folded strategy: Shaping and strengthening its internal identity and its citizens identity and building its external identity as an international actor. Therefore the assumptions regarding the

promotion of EU identity are valid in the case of the Bologna Process and such kind of a construction of European identity has increasingly been debated. Andrea Fejes (2008) is one of the scholars that took part in this discussion with his study on how the European citizen is constructed through texts on the Bologna process. For instance he takes the emphasis of the Bologna Declaration (1999, p.1). that:

“A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space”.

According to Fejes, the problem announced by the texts, is how to handle threats and risks in the future. The way to meet these risks and threats is to create a Europe of knowledge and European area of higher education. This idea is something taken for granted and seen as an essential part of the construction of a European citizen who could face the challenges of the new millennium and should feel a sense of belonging to a common cultural space. The European citizen would face these challenges with new competences as employable, flexible and mobile individuals educated within a standardized European higher education area. Further, this space should be created as a means for Europe to be able to compete with the surrounding world. Thus, there is an ambition to create sameness out of difference. At the same time as sameness is created, there is a practice of exclusion. The one who is not, does not want to or cannot become, the same will be created as ‘the other’. Together, these ideas represent a view that there is an essence of the European citizen that needs to be acknowledged; a Euro-centrism (Fejes, 2008, p. 520-525).

Similarly, Kushnir puts forward a critical approach towards the European identity constructed by the Bologna Process. Mobility and flexibility are now regarded as the main characteristics of both students and citizens whose self improvement enriches Europe and its worldwide competitiveness. Furthermore, According to Bergen Communiqué, (2005, p. 6). the EHEA aims to prepare the student ‘for the labour market, for further competence building and for active citizenship’. Yet, all students do not have these opportunities in reality, so they can not become one of the building blocks for the EHEA with its ideas of active citizenship, European values and identity. So there is a problem with exclusion and Europe is thus still emerging as a ‘space for all’ only within its borders (Kushnir, 2016, p. 671).

On the other hand, Bologna process has been evolving more with an economic focus and deviating from its original idea of common cultural Europe. As Tomusk puts (2004, p.77):

Initially, the Process focused largely on European higher education traditions and referred to the 1988 Magna Charta of the European Universities (CRE, 1988) and the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration (Sorbonne, 1998), both stressing European university traditions, European values and European culture. Somewhere on the way, however, a whole new dimension was added as a result of a sudden recognition that those great

treasures could be shared for money with people from other parts of the world, and that the economic standing of European universities could be significantly improved.

Various reports and documents related to the Bologna Process systematically use the same language as marketing consultants (Tomusk, 2004, p. 88). Through such a revision, the cultural mission of European higher education has been moved to the background. Reform was seen as a means to match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably the United States and Asia. Thus, the logic behind the Bologna process could be seen as a part of wider economic, social and technological transformations that the world has witnessed over the last years. In other words, Bologna reforms are not simply educational ones, there is a significant economic impetus behind them. Much of this restructuring in higher education has been based on the principles of neo liberalism and new institutional economics (Vural Yılmaz, 2016, p. 945).

Here comes another important point that whether Bologna Process could generate a homogenous higher education system competing with the other parts of the world (Kushnir, 2016, p. 667). Such a discourse and attempt to standardise policies and universities in all nation states cause so many tensions. Some countries adopt certain recommendations of Bologna within their own higher education systems in regard to structural matters, yet they try to avoid drastic changes in educational content. European countries follow the Bologna Process selectively, leaving certain areas of higher education systems untouched (Witte, 2006). European universities are expected to become more competitive with American universities, competing for overseas consumers, who are obviously expected to pay full price for the service (Tomusk, 2004, p. 86). Thus, another area of exclusion began to appear among the universities and students since thousands of European universities, particularly those in periphery, could not boost and reach to the world- quality research universities as demanded by the process (Tomusk, 2004, p. 91). Indeed, "it seems obvious that the world-class universities of Europe have little interest in paddling the boats of the Brussels bureaucrats, or of the second- and third rank universities of the European periphery" (Tomusk, 2004, p. 90).

Several studies (Hoffman, Välimaa & Huusko, 2008; Neave & Amaral, 2008; Veiga & Amaral, 2009) have pointed out that while the Bologna Process may have progressed well at the system level, it has not done so at the institutional and basic unit levels. As Rudder (2010, p.10) states "As far as the introduction of formalised European structures and procedures in higher education are concerned, the Bologna process can be described as a success story. Without underestimating the importance of common formalized structures and procedures we should nonetheless ask what they have contributed in real terms to the attainment of the major goals of the Bologna process – mobility and employability of students and academic staff and the attractiveness of European higher education".

The process seems to be suffering from an overload of additional and complementary activities which shadows the initial goals. In other words it seems that the means and ends of the process are blurred. Wolfgang Frühwald, the former president of German Research Council states that "*mental resistance to this reform is huge. I hardly know*

anyone – to be honest, no one – who is inspired by the change to Bachelor and Master courses. (...) The reforms are pushed by university managers, higher education organizations, and policymakers. The gap between those who design the reform and academics at the bottom is huge” (Pechar, 2012, p. 614).

It is obvious that the higher education community is deeply divided over the philosophy of ‘Bologna’. It seems that at the ‘front lines’, where academic teaching and research actually take place, the Bologna reforms are widely perceived as additional top-down measures and regulations which infringe academic freedom (Rudder, 2010, p.9). There are many voices calling for “Reform of the Bologna Reforms” (Vural Yılmaz, 2016: 946).

2- Bologna Reforms in Turkish Higher Education

Higher Education in Turkey includes all post-secondary institutions, which offers at least two years of formal education. After graduating from high school, students can enroll in higher education which is compatible with the Bologna three-cycle system. The system is centralized, with all higher education institutions tied to the Council of Higher Education (CoHE). It decides and coordinates main administrative and financial issues (e.g. student intake, appointment and dismissal of academic staff, supervision of university budgets, disciplinary issues, etc.).

The higher education system in Turkey started to develop in the 1930s in line with the Humboldtian model and continued with Anglo-Saxon influences in the 1960s. Hence, integration in the Western world has been a determining driver of higher education policies (Yağcı, 2010, p. 588). The candidacy for EU membership can be seen as a continuation of the same integration idea. The relations between Turkey and EU started with Turkey’s application associate membership in the European Economic Community in 1959. Following the approval of the application by EEC, an Association Agreement known as the Ankara Agreement was signed on September 12, 1963. The recognition of Turkey as a candidate country for accession at the Helsinki European Council of December 1999, opened a new era in Turkey-EU relations. As the candidate country of the EU Turkey has gained the right to full participation in the EU’s programs and officially joined the Bologna process in 2001.

From the mid-1990s onwards, attempts for restructuring higher education system have increased with a focus on market economy and competitiveness (Barblan, Ergüder & Gürüz 2008, p. 56) and Bologna process has been perceived as a catalyst to accelerate this restructuring. Turkey’s motivation behind integration into the European education space through the Bologna process can be interpreted in two different ways. First, it can be evaluated as Europeanisation. Despite the fact that Bologna Process was not announced as a part of the EU, it aims at constructing a common higher education space primarily defined by the European norms. Secondly, it can also be seen as a part of the internationalisation strategy in response to globalisation. One could say that these two imperatives are not totally distinct processes, rather they are intertwined. In case of Turkey, internationalisation was put forward as a strategy in the 1990’s, yet it gained a great impetus after the membership to Bologna process in 2001 (Onursal Beşgöl, 2016,

p.97).

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the Interuniversity Council (UAK) are involved in the process as stakeholders. The Turkish National Agency was established in 2002. One year after establishing the Turkish National Agency, Erasmus-European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been launched as a pilot Project in 2003. In 2005, YÖDEK as an independent organization for quality assurance was established and universities were called for establishing their quality mechanisms (YÖK, 2012).

It can be said that the CoHE makes use of the Bologna Process as a means of restructuring the HES in Turkey. 2007 strategy report of CoHE (YÖK, 2007) which covers the Bologna Process extensively, emphasizes the concept of a “knowledge society” and aims to prepare Turkey for changes taking place in the global arena. The report states that Turkey “should fulfill the demands of the knowledge society by increasing its competitiveness in the world and also by becoming an effective actor in the areas of European education and research.” In line with this policy, national restructuring policy has been developed along the lines of Bologna Qualifications Frameworks, Quality Assurance, the European Credit Transfer System, Diploma Supplement, Mobility, Lifelong Learning Programmes, Joint Degrees and the Social Dimension (YÖK 2010, p. 24). In 2008, the CoHE created a *Bologna Coordination Commission* (BEK) in each university. BEKs are responsible for the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms at the institutional level. Members are appointed by the rector and are selected from staff working in international relations, quality assurance, mobility and student affairs (YÖK, 2012).

In 2011, an addendum was made to Article 44 of the Law on Higher Education (Law No. 2547) to prompt universities to make the required changes in their administrative and academic structures regarding the introduction of ECTS, learning outcomes, course descriptions, student workloads and diploma supplements. (Kaya, 2015, p. 117). Thus, Turkish universities have been implementing Bologna reforms as a legal requirement. In terms of implementation of Bologna reforms, Turkish higher education system performs well in some areas, while there is no progress in other action lines. Bologna scorecards of Turkey (From Bergen-2005 to Bucharest-2012) imply that at the initial stage of the process Turkish Higher education was more compatible with the reforms. Yet, as additional action lines like lifelong learning came into picture, performance of Turkish universities went worse.

An investigation of Turkish performance regarding each action line reveals the following general results: As for the degree structure, which calls for the establishment of a system based on two main cycles of undergraduate and graduate studies, Turkey did not have to undergo significant structural changes because it had already adopted the cyclical structure of the US model. The decline in Bologna performance is resulted from quality assurance and lifelong learning to a great extent. In particular lack of external quality assurance mechanisms and inadequate student participation lead to this performance downgrade. Recognition of prior non-formal studies is another problematic area regarding Turkish higher education. As for the joint degrees, there are no legal barriers, yet the quantity and quality of joint programs are questionable. Thus, in general

terms it could be said that Turkish higher education has no important problems in terms of structural changes needed by the Bologna reforms since it has already been based on the US system. Yet, the substance of the regulations and whether they serve to develop the quality of higher education are questionable (Vural Yılmaz, 2016, p. 947).

On the other hand, there are academic and societal tensions regarding the question of whether the Process should be perceived as an expression of internationalization, Americanization, or Europeanization. Turkish higher education system has witnessed many great changes since the announcement of the Bologna process and most of the restructuring has been made in reference to the Process. It is under discussion whether this transformation is voluntary or imposed by the national authorities, mentioned also in this paper. Yet, in terms of institutional change we could definitely see the impact of institutional Europeanisation. On the other hand, discursively, this process is intentionally not being defined as Europeanisation and kept apart from the EU accession process. Official documents on the national higher education policy and Bologna process do not include any reference to the EU and the accession. In a study carried out with the Bologna experts (Onursal Beşgöl, 2016), all of the experts interviewed indicated that the Bologna Process was and should be kept apart from the EU. It is emphasized by the policy makers and experts that the Bologna process is not a EU driven process and is not linked to the EU accession. National authorities were concerned that the rising Euroskepticism would undermine the Bologna process. Thus, the EU accession and Bologna reforms has been announced as separate processes, the former is political and the latter is technical one (Onursal Beşgöl, 2016, p. 98).

As Onursal Beşgöl stated (2016, p. 102),

"The Bologna Process has been intentionally kept apart from the Europeanisation process, because the legitimacy and credibility of the EU are in question. De-Europeanisation is visible in the ways in which the agents refrain from referring to the EU/Europeanisation process, fearing that to do so would lead to backlash against the reform process taking place in the higher education area".

Yet, there are two problems with this conceptualisation. First, Bologna Process in Turkey has been imposed as a sole technical process with no discussions on its political, cultural and educational dimensions. Overemphasize on the technical dimension of the process has made it a bureaucratic and mechanical process which has been increasingly perceived as a overburden for academic life. Second, again due to the authoritarian implementation, the reforms were seen as obligations ordered from Europe, similar to the conditions of the EU for the accession. These two factors together, increase the resentment from and objection to the Bologna process among the academics.

The democratic deficit evolved at the very beginning of the process, since it immediately took start with official orders of the CoHE without participation of the universities. The announcement and implementation of the Bologna reforms have been made in an authoritarian style by the use of extensive authority of the CoHE over the universities. Thus, most changes have remained just as technical matters that were carried out by the authority of national bodies without understanding or questioning the

meaning and importance for universities. A field research carried out with academics responsible from the Bologna process in fifteen public and foundation/private universities (Coşar&Ergül, 2015) reflects this problem with the words of an academician responsible for the implementation of the BP in a public university for seven years (Coşar&Ergül, 2015, p.117):

"The unit in charge of the BP [in the university] regularly informs us about the procedures or deadlines via official announcements...with a very hierarchical, very patriarchal language...as if someone gives you an order [in the army]...‘those teams in charge of BP: you are requested to finish this and that by the deadline mentioned..."

As stated above, a great deal of academicians perceives Bologna process as a top-down bureaucratic regulations which are no more than an additional workload. Thus, implementation of the process lacks participation and enthusiasm of the most important actors, universities. Indeed, the Bologna Process has been working without leaving a room for the possible opposition of the universities and academics. The necessary changes for the adjustment have been imposed by official orders as technical matters. The process has been declared as a technical means for the improvement of higher education system and the CoHE has not get into dialogue with the universities on the philosophy of the process (Coşar&Ergül, 2015, pp. 112-113). Yet, the voice of the universities should be more taken into consideration for democratic and sustainable implementation of the process. In the next section, a research carried out to contribute to literature in this sense is presented.

3- Research on the Opinions of Research Assistants on European Identity and the Bologna Process

The research was conducted to explore the views from the field on the meaning and implementation of the Bologna Process including its linkage with the Europeanization. To this end a survey was carried out in 2017 with the participation of 145 research assistants working in 10 faculties in Suleyman Demirel University.

3.1. Methodology

A questionnaire was designed for research assistants composed of three different styles of questions to explore their perceptions and evaluations regarding the European identity and the implementation of Bologna reforms. In the first part of the questionnaire, demographic characteristics of the respondents and their level of knowledge on the Bologna process were investigated. In the second part, yes/no questions were asked to explore the opinions of the participants on the European identity, Bologna Process and Turkish higher education. In the last part, participants were asked to state their position (agree/disagree) on the statements about the implementation of the Process.

Survey questions were formed in the light of literature, Bologna reports and the issues raised in national/ international meetings that the researcher participated in. The survey was previewed by 5 research assistants participated in the Bologna process implementation at the university. To ensure the quality of the research, 100 % sampling was targeted, yet the research assistants in the faculties of medicine and dentistry were

not included in the study due to their different legal status and heavy workload. Questionnaires were distributed and collected through face to face contact in May 2019, at eleven faculties of the university. The researchers informed research assistants about the content and aim of the survey and collected information from 145 voluntary participants.

The main limitation of the survey is limited participation due to the difficulty in contacting with all research assistants and their workload. Another important limitation is that the questions were restricted both in number and content for the sake of simplicity for participants. In addition, participants stated that their level of knowledge on the Bologna Process is low.

3-2- Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

At the time of data collection, the number of research assistants in Süleyman Demirel University (excluding Medicine and Dentistry) were 339. The number of research assistants responded to the survey is 145 which represents the total number at the ratio of 43%. The 64% of respondents were female. 32% of the respondents are studying at master's level, 59% at doctorate level and 9% are with doctorate degree. The biggest proportion of the respondents (44%) has work experience as research assistants between 0 and 3 years.

As for the level of knowledge on Bologna process, findings are as following: 28% of respondents stated that they have very little information, while 35% have little information on the process. 33% of the respondents stated that they have information at moderate level and only 9% of the respondents have sufficient information. Thus, it is apparent that most of research assistants have little information on the process. This fact was reflected in the survey as high rates of responses of "no idea".

3-3- Findings

The survey is composed of 2 main sections which explore first the evaluations of research assistants on Bologna process and Europeanization in general and secondly its implementation at Turkish higher education system. The findings of the survey are presented below.

3-3-1- Opinions on European Identity, Bologna Process and Turkish Higher Education

First part of the survey was designed to find out the views of the research assistants about the Europeanization and its relation with the Bologna Process. These concepts were handled in relation to Turkey and Turkish higher education as well. Related questions are presented below.

Participants were first asked to choose one of the possible definitions that they think most suitable for defining Bologna Process. At the end of the definitions "other" option was added so that participants could state their own definition if they do not agree with the given ones. Yet, any research assistant filled the "other" option.

Table 1- Definition of the Bologna Process.

How do you <u>primarily</u> define the Bologna process?	%
It is a process that creates a common European identity.	%60,0
It is a process that increases mobility in higher education.	%22,1
It is a process that creates opportunities for reform in the higher education system.	%8,3
It is a process that accelerates the economic development	%1,4
It is a process that makes European universities competetive against the US universities.	%2,1
It is a process that increases commercialization of higher education	%0,7
It is a process that erodes our national identity	%0,7
Other (please specify)	

Table 2. Opinions on European Identity and Bologna Process.

	Yes	No	No idea
Is it possible to talk about a common European identity?	%33,1	%52,4	%13,1
Does the Bologna process contribute to the formation of European identity?	%44,8	%33,8	%20,7
Is Turkey a part of European identity?	%25,5	%60,7	%13,1
Does Bologna process contribute to the Europeanization of Turkey?	%30,3	%54,5	%14,5
Does the Bologna process contribute to Turkey's process of full membership to the EU?	%14,5	%51	%33,1
With Bologna process, is Turkish higher education becoming a part of European higher education?	%45,2	%43,1	%11
Is the Bologna process a threat to our national identity in the field of higher education?	%14,7	%67,1	%16,9
Do you consider yourself a part of European higher education with your researcher identity?	%32,6	%60,2	%6,6
As a student, do you see yourself as a part of European higher education?	%32,3	%58,6	%8,4

A significant proportion of the respondents (60%) stated that they primarily perceive Bologna process as one that creates a common European identity. Bologna is a process that increases academic mobility for 22.1% of the participants and it is perceived as an opportunity for restructuring the higher education sytem. It can be inferred from these responses that the Bologna process is primarily thought to be related with the identity issue. Its basic aim is to create a European identity. Yet, responses given following questions reveal different findings. When the participants were asked “Is it possible to talk about a common European identity?”, slightly more than half of them responded as “no”. Thus, it could be inferred that though the Bologna Process is perceived to be a means for creating a European identity, it is yet hard to talk about the existence of such an identity.

When it comes to the European identity, Bologna Process and Turkey, findings depict a more pessimistic picture. 60% of the research assistants do not think that Turkey is a

part of the European identity. Similarly nearly 55% of the respondents do not believe that Bologna process contribute to the Europeanization of Turkey. 51% of respondents state that Bologna process does not contribute to Turkey's process of full membership to the EU. This result may be due to the awareness of the respondents about the distinction between two processes or they might be thinking that the Bologna process do not produce enough outcomes that will ease the accession. 33% of the respondents have no idea about this question implying that they have not enough knowledge or idea on the relationship between the EU accession and the Bologna Process. Next question is "With Bologna process, is Turkish higher education becoming a part of European higher education?" and the answers given to this question is distributed as nearly equal. 45% of respondents give positive answer while 43% think negative on that issue.

67% of the research assistants do not believe that Bologna process is a threat to our national identity in the field of higher education. It seems that young researchers do not perceive European cooperation as a threat to national identity when higher education and research take into consideration. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents do not consider themselves as a part of European higher education with their researcher and student identities. Thus, it could be concluded that researchers perceive Bologna process as a part of the Europeanization which aims at creating a common European identity. Yet, they do not think that such an identity has been built to the moment. In addition they do not believe that Turkey is a part of the European identity. They also do not feel themselves as a part of the European higher education area individually.

3-3-2- Opinions on the Implementation of Bologna Process in Turkey

Following questions were designed explore Bologna experience of research assistants in terms of implementation of the reforms in Turkey and to this end participants were asked whether they agree with the 15 statements given.

Table 3: Opinions on the Implementation of Bologna Process.

	Agree	Disagree	No idea
Goals of the Bologna process are realistic and obtainable	%39	%44,8	%14,8
Bologna reforms ignore the specific conditions of each higher education system peculiar to that country.	%52,8	%21,4	%14,5
Bologna process establish a hierararchical structure between the universities of centre and periphery	%45,5	%30,3	%23,4
The mobility of students and teaching staff gives more opportunity to those having more financial resources.	%51,7	%13,8	%33,1
Grants awarded for student and teaching staff mobility are sufficient.	%13,1	%38,6	%47,6
Research assistants have sufficient opportunities to benefit from the mobility programs.	%5,5	%62,4	%30,7
The process enhances the quality of graduate education.	%29	%55,5	%14,8
Research assistants are adequately represented in the decision-making processes of the Bologna process.	%6,9	%66,9	%25,5
Student participation is sufficient in the decision-making processes of the Bologna process.	%18,3	%57,2	%23,1

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Bologna process has been transformed into an excessive bureaucratic process where the distinction between means and ends has been blurred.	%55,5	%17,9	%25,2
Bologna reforms are implemented formally, yet they do not result in qualitative development.	%62,1	%13,8	%23,4
Bologna process has been perceived as an unnecessary workload.	%59,3	%17,9	%21,4
Implementataion of the Bologna process creates additional workload for the research assitants.	%62,9	%16,7	%19,7

First question of this section was asked to find out whether research assistants find the goals of the process as realistic and attainable. There is no marked difference on thet issue. While 39% of respondents find the goals as realistic and obtainable, 45% of them disagree. Thus, it might be said that there is no general consensus on the Bologna objectives. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (52.8%) agree that Bologna reforms ignore the specific conditions of each higher education system. 21 % of the researchers disagree with this statement. This finding seems to confirm the critics about the over standardization resulted from Bologna Process. Yet, according to nearly half of the respondents (45.5%), Bologna process establishes a hierarachical structure between the universities of centre and periphery, as well. Thus Bologna process aims at standardization on the one hand, but it creates a hierarchy among the universities on the other hand.

Similarly, more than half of the research assistants (51.7%) perceive an inequality regarding the mobility programmes in that individuals with more financial resources have more opportunity for mobility. This idea might result from the fact that students with a better socio-economic background have more opportunities in terms of foreign language skills and cultural capacity for accessing such study abroad programmes. In addition, usually mobility grants are not adequate to finance study period abroad, thus additional resources are necessary. As a matter of fact, 39% of research assistants think that grants awarded for student and teaching staff mobility are not sufficient. Besides, nearly half of the respondents (47.6%) have no idea about the mobility grants which reveals that they have not attempted to benefit from mobility. 62% of research assistants think that they do not have enough opportunities to benefit from the mobility programs. On the other hand, 55% of the respondents do not believe that the process enhances the quality of graduate education.

More than half of the respondents do not think that neither research assistants nor students are adequately represented in the decision-making processes of the Bologna process (66.9% and 57.2% respectively). This result confirms the arguments on the democracy deficit in terms of decision-making and implementation of the process. Next four questions were formulated to explore opinions of the research assistants on the formal and bureaucratic dimension of the process which is criticised by many academics. 55% of the participants believe that Bologna process has been transformed into an excessive bureaucratic process and 62% of the respondents think that it is implemented just formally, lacking the qualitative issues. Again, nearly 60% of the respondents remark that Bologna process has been perceived as an unnecessary workload in their

universities. 63% of the research assistants think that implementation of the Bologna process creates additional workload for the research assistants. These responses support the idea that Bologna process is increasingly getting more bureaucratic and creating a heavy workload which makes it perceived as an unnecessary technical process.

Discussion

Turkey, which is a candidate country for full membership in the EU, became a member of the Bologna process in 2001 and Turkish higher education has witnessed significant changes since then. In fact, the main driving force behind Turkish higher education policies has long been integration with the Western world. Turkish universities have implemented many important regulations in accordance with the Bologna process, yet the qualitative dimension of the reforms is questionable. In addition, its contribution to the idea of a common European identity has been debated in both Europe and in Turkey. Do the members of Turkish academic community feel themselves as a part of European higher education area is an important question with no answer, yet. Maybe a more important question is that, do they want to be a part of Europe and European higher education which is difficult to find an answer. Rising Euroskepticism and political tensions make the process a more turbulent one.

On the other hand, critics about the implementation of Bologna process are increasing. The process is being criticized on the ground that it has deviated from its original principles of cultural values and intellectual freedom. It has begun to be dominated by market oriented principles and goals. Today, Bologna reforms are not simply educational ones, there is a significant economic impetus behind them. The process seems to be suffering from an overload of additional and complementary activities which shadows the initial goals. It is obvious that the higher education community is deeply divided over the philosophy of 'Bologna'. It seems that at the 'front lines', where academic teaching and research actually take place, the Bologna reforms are widely perceived as additional top-down measures and regulations which infringe academic freedom.

Main findings of the survey presented in this paper pave the way for similar debates. More than half of the respondents do not think that neither research assistants nor students are adequately represented in the decision-making processes of the Bologna process. This finding also confirms the arguments on the democracy deficit in terms of decision-making and implementation of the process. Although it is stated that the process is based on volunteer participation and there is no legal reinforcement, this is not the case in practice. In Turkey, implementation of reforms have been directed by CoHE as a central governing body through various regulations and directives which are obligatory for universities. The heavy workload of Bologna regulations has been left to scholars and research assistants who have more responsibility but less authority. Nearly 60% of the respondents remark that Bologna process has been perceived as an unnecessary workload in their universities. Similarly 63% of the research assistants think that implementation of the Bologna process creates additional workload for the research assistants. These responses support the idea that Bologna process is increasingly getting more bureaucratic and creating a heavy workload which makes it perceived as an

unnecessary technical process lacking democratic participation and enthusiasm from the academics.

More importantly, the philosophy of Bologna process should be discussed in terms of the idea of common European values and identity. We should discuss whether Bologna process could contribute to the constitution of common values based on intellectual and academic freedom or will it be another source of exclusion? Will the process deepen the gaps among universities and students? Findings from our research give negative signals on that issue. Although participants perceive Bologna process as a part of the Europeanization which aims at creating a common European identity, they do not think that such an identity has been built, yet. Besides, they do not believe that Turkey is a part of the European identity. They also do not feel themselves as a part of the European higher education area individually. There is no general consensus on the Bologna objectives and it is perceived as a process aiming at standardization on the one hand, but creating a hierarchy among the universities on the other hand.

Bologna Process aims to increase the global attractiveness of Europe's universities with the inclusion of the external dimension into the process. Yet, despite this clear policy orientation it is not clear whether there is an European higher education brand that could be promoted abroad. This is to a great extent results from the lack of a common identity and image of Europe, the difficulty in building such a brand with many different national systems and institutions (Obst& Forster, 2005, p.17). Indeed, while being under a common European flag could be useful for smaller and relatively unknown institutions, universities with their well known brands do not prefer to be limited to European identity and image.

So what will be the place of peripheral universities that could not or do not comply with the requisites of being a member of the Europe of knowledge? Or what will be the place of students that could not find the opportunity to become mobile, flexible and employable individuals? Perhaps it's better to close this paper with the words of Voldemar Tomusk (2004, p. 92): *"We in Europe love being equal, but that costs a lot of money, which poor Third World students may not have, leaving aside the utter immorality of ripping them off in universities, hundreds of which belong among the worst ones to be found on this planet"*.

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