

The Bologna Process and the EHEA – A New European Normative Regime?

DRAFT

Yoav Friedman, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

In the last 50 years the academic community has tried to conceptualize Europe's "Power" in order to understand its political nature. On the one hand, the EU has been perceived as an economic giant, and on the other hand as a political dwarf whose political power does not fit its economic abilities (Medrano, 1999: 155). This paper uses Regime Theory as a heuristic base which enable a very comprehensive explanation for the creation, institutionalization, function and growth of international cooperation, through which the EU convey its global political and normative influence. The international regime functions in this matter as a mechanism which ties up the European regionalism process and the European Normative Power theory (NPE)(Manners, 2002). By pinpointing this mechanism the paper wishes to shed a light on the spot where regional becomes global, and Europe turns from a dwarf to a giant.

The main thesis of this paper suggests that the EU uses its known practices of regionalism process as a tool which will enable it to influence global trends and non-EU member states' policies in the field of higher education. The case study chosen to demonstrate how the EU nurtured the Bologna Process in order to exert its normative power, inside and outside, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

This short paper is built out of 4 parts: First – a short introduction to the Normative Power Europe theory. The second part focuses on the Bologna Process, an international reform in the field of higher education, generated in Europe. Thirdly, the paper will present the External Dimension of the Bologna Process in light of the regime theory; this part will provide a model which conceptualizes Bologna Process' External Dimension as a Regional-International Regime. The fourth part will look at the Israeli case which demonstrates the effectiveness of Bologna Process' External Dimension as an international regime by applying the Normative Power theory.

Normative Power Europe

The idea of European normative power is an overarching narrative which asks to define EU's way of behavior in the international arena (Gerrits, 2009:4). The first to coin the term was Ian Manners, who defined the EU as entity which is "able to shape conceptions of 'normal' in

international relations" (Manners, 2002:239). The idea of normative influence as an EU practice in international relation was a paradigmatic shift in the discussion over the political nature of the EU which traditionally turns around the tension between 'hard power' and 'soft power' (Nye, 1990:153; Carr, 1962:108; Duchêne, 1972; Bull, 1982). The innovation of manners idea lies in the understanding that the EU should be examined not by its actions (what it does), but by its nature (what it is) (Manners,2002: 252), meaning to define its 'actorness' by its character (Whitman, 2011: 2). The theory argues that the EU is able to determine one's standards and preferences by the proliferation of norms without the use coercion means, even though overlapping is possible (Diez and Manners, 2007: 175-6). While claiming for normative action, the NPE theory suggests diffusion of globally applicable principles, which perceived as legit thanks to their universality (Manners, 2008:65-7). Being European driven, these principles are firstly applied in the EU itself in so called "procedural ethics" e.g. that the EU is applying what it is preaching. Meaningful implementation of these norms in Europe makes the EU a global role model which holds normative influence.

Accepting the concept of NPE brings two pivotal questions to the floor – First, the question of success; does the EU indeed achieve its normative aims and manage to act as a normative leader? And second, what makes actors in the global arena to be subjected to European normative power, while the compliance or non-compliance to these norms will not carry any sanctions or direct benefits? (Hurd, 2007:30).

Scholars have tried to provide answers to these riddles by analyzing different case studies, mostly taken from the security and defense areas. Nearly all case studies could not provide strong evidences to affirm the theory – on the contrary: many realistic thinkers has criticized the theory claiming that Europe has no ability to bring non-European countries to apply European norms without any use of military or economic means (Merlingen, 2007; Hyde-Price, 2006:218; Sjursen, 2005).

Although still debated, the validity of normative influence is difficult to be spotted in "hard" policy areas, a fact that puts the whole theory under a question mark. Yet, this paper claims that the NPE theory can be identified and demonstrated by examining case studies taken from "softer" policy areas. In these areas the importance of being part of an "International Community" led by the EU – is perceived greater by actors. In these areas, the will to be part of an international club brings actors to internalize external values and norms because they are perceived as universally legitimate (Karns and Mingst, 2010:31). This understanding

narrows the distance between the concept of Europe as a normative power, to Europe as a hegemon.

A breakthrough in the way European normative influence can be seen with the linking normative elements in the EU international behavior to the Gramscian idea of "Hegemony" (Diez, 2013:198). This link enables to grasp "normative power" as a complement component of the concept of hegemony, and to conceptualize the EU's normative behavior in the international arena in a more robust manner. Higher education policy as a "soft" policy area was chosen to prove this point as the Bologna Process was proven to gain international hold outside of the EHEA. In this regard, the Bologna Process demonstrates how European normative leadership can be identified, conceptualized and be explained.

The Bologna Process – Regional Aspects and International Aspirations

The Bologna process, launched in 1999, is a voluntary commitment originally taken by 29 European countries, members and not members in the EU. The Bologna Declaration and the process following it are all part of a non-binding reform in higher education systems, aiming at strengthening the cooperation and coordination between different European higher education systems. The process reflects the pan-European need to find answers for common problems in the field of higher education, like: mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications, low employability rate of graduates and mobility barriers caused by incompatibility between national higher education systems.

The Bologna Process aims at creating the European Higher Education Area: a region in which all national higher education systems built on mutual architecture, enabling students and staff to be easily mobile and therefore to contribute to the European economy more efficiently. The success of the Bologna Process is phenomenal – since its establishment, all 47 countries which are signatories to the Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe (1954)¹ have also joined the Bologna Process, and many other countries which cannot formally join, demonstrate their motivation to bring their higher education systems to be compatible with it.

It is important to stress that the Bologna Process is not an EU initiative, rather a process developed under the auspices of the Council of Europe. Yet, as the EU plays a pivotal role in the promotion and financing the process, one can say that the BP is as another step in the

¹ A prerequisite to become a part to the Bologna declaration is a membership at the Council of Europe and reaffirming the "European Cultural Convention".

long path of European integration, for a new policy area is being regulated super-nationally by the EU. Although the Bologna Process is not an EU project *per se*, since its acceptance as a full member to the Bologna Process in 2001, the EU became the most dominant voice in the Bologna Process. It was claimed that the EU exploit the process because the potential it bears to assist it to empower EU's economy and to support Lisbon Strategy's² goals to become "*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*".

Indeed, on its first years the Bologna Process was developed to provide policy solutions for regional problems mutual to the *European* countries. Making the European systems more efficient by removing bureaucratic (national) barriers to mobility and easing the academic recognition, the process' aim was to make sure that Europe will keep its attractiveness and enhance mobility to fulfil its economic potential.

Even though not fully implemented within the European countries themselves, it was relatively fast when countries outside of Europe started to show interest in the Process: the policy tools that were developed and implemented in an ever increasing number of European countries (as ECTS, DS and EQF as well as the establishment of the ENQA) seemed to provide a solution for problems that even non-European countries cope with.

Even though the Bologna Process was originally established to solve regional inner-European problems in the areas of economic competition, academic recognition and employability, it was soon evident that the process has much larger global affect. It was in 2003 when Bologna Process' Berlin Communique' presented for the first time the concepts of "Openness" and "cooperation" alongside with the concept of "global competition", while referring to the missions of the process. Adding the "external" elements to the Bologna Process' list of mission's, hints about the global normative nature of the process as well as on its future mission. The global turn of the process was institutionalize with the establishment of the "External Dimension Work Group" aiming to create a method through which the Bologna Process should be implemented outside of the EHEA. Two years after the concepts were introduced they were embedded in the Process' action-lines, when Bologna's "External

² The European Council held a special meeting on 23-24 March 2000 in Lisbon to agree a new strategic goal for the Union in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy. The aim of the Lisbon Strategy, launched in March 2000 by the EU heads of state and government, was to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. (European Council, 2000).

Dimension" was brought to vote on the ministerial meeting in Bergen 2005 (Bergen Communiqué, 2005:4):

"The EHEA must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world. Our contribution to achieving education for all should be based on the principle of sustainable development and be in accordance with the ongoing international work on developing guidelines for quality provision of cross-border higher education. [...] We see the EHEA as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world [...] We look forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by sharing our experiences of reform processes with neighboring regions. [...] We see the need to identify partner regions and intensify the exchange of ideas and experiences with those regions [...]"

The follow-up group that was established to monitor the external influence of the process found that indeed countries and regions outside of Europe are deeply influenced by the process, and that in some places reforms in light of Bologna process were taken (EUA, 2007:64). The ministries, who understood the potential the external influence has to create a world-wide "European" reform saw how Europe can gain importance and influence on top of its global competitors in the field – mainly the US and Australia. Therefore, in order to maintain the momentum, the external dimension was further developed and deepened; In the following ministerial meeting, in Leuven 2009, the "external Dimension" and the "international Openness" were the main issues on the agenda. In the Leuven communiqué published that year, the call was clearly out:

"[...] The attractiveness and openness of European higher education will be highlighted by joint European actions. Competition on a global scale will be complemented by enhanced policy dialogue and cooperation based on partnership with other regions of the world[...]"

And also:

To provide "information on the EHEA specifically targeted at non-EHEA countries, which should include [...] facilitating coordinated information visits to and from non-EHEA countries" (Bologna Process, 2009:4[16] ; 5 [26])

Following Leuven communiqué, another working group was established titled: "International Openness – the European Higher Education Area in Global Context" (BFUG, 2012:20-1). The working group, operated between the years 2009-2012, was asked to develop the

international strategy for the process, to create the "Bologna Policy Forum" (BPF) as an arena where "outsider" interested countries could participate in the discussion over the process' policy shaping as well as to enhance the dissemination of the process outside of the EHEA. The concluding report of the working group submitted in 2012 underlined the transformation that the Bologna Process has gone through, while from aiming to increase the competitiveness of the European HE system, it is now a "partner" to other regional HE systems (BFUG, 2012:4). The meaning is that countries outside the EHEA have started to cooperate with the BP as regions, demonstrating how a process that was firstly implemented in Europe was adopted as a policy in other places in the world. Evidences to the European influence on non-EU national higher education systems can be found in process like "the Brisbane declaration" in Australia in 2006 (DEST, 2006), the debate over the national response to the Bologna Process in Canada (Brink, 2006; Vassiliou, 2012) and even the establishment of the Bologna Training Centre in Israel. This trend of turning non-European HESs to be compatible with the EHEA can be explained as policy convergence.

International cooperation, policy convergence and regime formation

The process of international policy convergence which conforms to European policy-led process conveys a strong influence of European practices, norms and values. The "European presence" in non-EU higher education systems makes the Bologna Process to be more than a "process", rather a unique form of European political tool, which can be seen as an International Higher Education Regime (Amaral, 2010:57).

While normative compliance and international cooperation between actors contrasts the realistic Hobbesian view on the international system, where all actors compete in a zero-sum game over abilities and power (Bull, 1977: 3), a need for an explanation of the mechanisms that enable them to act in reciprocity without losing their sovereignty - is rising (Keoheane,1986:8).

While academic literature is saturated with definitions for international cooperation (Ruggie, 1975:570-1; Young, 1980: 331, 1982: 278, 1992: 44; Puchala and Hopkins, 1982:247; Haggard and Simmons, 1987:493-4), there is one vastly acknowledged definition of international regime defining it as an "Implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations" (Krasner, 1982: 186).

Accepting Krasner's definition for regime enables a clear discussion over elements of international normative influence. It is claimed that regimes' power stems from two main sources: one is the profound legitimacy which lies in the basis of the regime (the belief in the need for the regime which brought to its establishment in the first place), while the second is the unique abilities and competences that only the regime as a framework holds (knowledge and technical abilities). After mutual agreement over norms of action and practices by all members of the regime, the two above mentioned characteristics allow the regime to act autonomously and to hold influence over the actors (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999:707).

In this regard, the Bologna Process provides a good example for an international regime. First and foremost, the Process creates an international public good in the shape of a framework for cooperation and internationalization of higher education. Secondly, the institutional structure of the process, even unintentionally, projects the Process' political nature: The incremental institutionalization of the Bologna Process as a declaration-based policy backed by a European-led secretariat, periodically meetings of all stakeholders, as well as setting up a monitoring benchmarking mechanism demonstrates its regime-like behavior. But most importantly, the process signals that there is a global order in higher education policy, which is dictated by a global leader. As being the entity that funds and steer the BP, one can say that the EU functions as a hegemon in the field of higher education in a global sense. Even if not manifesting itself an explicit pressure, the EU, via the Bolognian regime, brings countries outside of the EHEA to apply its norms, principles and values on their HESs. In this regard one can say that by elevating the regional Bologna Process to an international regime, the EU enhances the process of the Europeanization³ of global higher education, by that strengthening its own status as a global hegemon, and thus – a global normative power.

The Israeli case

³ Europeanization is a process in which "domestic policy areas become subjected to a policy of the European Union" (Börzel, 1999). From a different angle, Europeanization can be seen as "an incremental process which affects the direction of policy in a way which converge the organizational logic of national policy-making process with an "European thinking" by adopting and accepting the European ideas and moral in a process of learning and education"(Ladrech 1994: 69). Claudio Radaelli (Radaelli, 2000:4) defines Europeanization in a definition which relates well to regime theory, stating that "Europeanization is a Processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies

In this regard, the Israeli response to the Bologna Process case study provides striking example for European normative influence.

The Israeli HES is rather a young one, for it was founded less than 100 years ago. While Israeli research is vastly internationalized, the system itself, in sense of teaching and learning is rather local and closed comparing to the American or the European ones. This can be said due to the relatively low rate of foreign student and faculty come to study and teach in Israel, and low rate of Israeli students who combine international character in their studies. In recent years, it is evident that Israeli academia make efforts to bridge this gap in order to promote its international profile of teaching and learning in order to maintain its international prestige and quality. One of the prominent engines for this process was the introduction of the Bologna Process to Israeli academia.

Historically, the Israeli response to the Bologna Process was dual: on the one hand, from a political-economic perspective, the Israeli council for higher education stated to show interest in the BP on 2006, when it witnessed the effect BP has on European countries and their ability to gain revenues from harmonising their HESs. On 2007 Israel voluntarily asked to join the declaration and applied to the Bologna secretariat. The Israeli appeal was declined for Israel was neither a member to the Council of Europe nor a party to the European Cultural Convention – two basic perquisites for becoming a member at the bologna declaration. The following year Israel re-applied, and was declined again for the same reasons, yet received an observatory status. It is to be said that the formal Israeli appeals to the Bologna Process in 2007-8 were mainly a political decision which were not backed with a long discussion on the academic implication of the process. After it was decline for the second time, Israel didn't took any formal measure to follow the process' evolution and development, except of sending representation to the biannual Bologna Policy Forums, and keeping the European funded "Higher Education Reform Experts" group who participated in different activities organized by the Bologna Process on the behalf of the state of Israel.

On the other hand, an interesting bottom-up process of "getting closer to Europe" started to arose by the side of Israeli HEIs after the second fail-trail to formally join the process. Starting from 2008, Israel was recognized by the EU commission as eligible to participate in European funded frameworks for mobility and modernization of higher education -the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus frameworks. These projects are grasped by the Israeli HEIs as mechanisms which assist to bridge the gap between the high level of internationalization in

research and the low level of internationalization in teaching and learning. Due to the fact that participation in these kinds of projects demands a relatively high compatibility with the EHEA, Israeli HEIs reached the understanding that deeper familiarity with the BP is crucial.

To date, Israeli HES is getting closer to Europe, while promoting the adoption/compatibility with several Bolognian elements as complying with the European Network for Quality Assurance in HE guidelines, developing an Israeli Diploma supplement, developing policy towards of compatibility between the Israeli credit system with the ECTS, using Learning Outcomes methodology Etc.

Moreover, it was in 2012 when a "Bologna Training Center" as a national information and training center was launched in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. The Center was established in order to promote an informed discussion over the Bologna Process and its implication on the Israeli HES as well as to assist HEIs to deepen their familiarity and compatibility with the BP. Hence, although Israel is not a party to the Bologna Process, it still has an important influence on the Israeli HES, as it is a model for internationalization of the system as a whole.

This demonstrate that the Bologna Process evoked a twofold response in Israel – one is a formal Top-down response which had a rather weak influence, and a second, informal, Bottom-up response, generated in rather spontaneous manner without the involvement of any official European body. To date, the Bologna Process is a term known almost to all in the Israeli HES, and it is used as a platform for internationalization strategies for various higher education institutions in Israel. This is to show how a European policy managed to diffuse to a non-European country without any use of coercive means. The Israeli case can be seen as a local exploitation of a European policy – as was specified in the NPE literature, European policies go through a local cultural membrane and brings to European influence at third countries: as in fact, a reform is undertaken in Israel following exposure to European influence.

The Israeli case demonstrates the success of the External Dimension of the Bologna Process, and strengthens the claim for European hegemony in the field of global higher education. The fact that a policy, shaped by Europe in order to promote its own interests exerted the European borders and became an acceptable and even wanted policy world-wide, proves the claim for a globally diffused European norms.

Conclusion

For conclusion, although suffers of misbelief by the academic community, it is to see that the EU holds, alongside with its "economic power" also a valid "normative power" in its foreign relations arsenal. The Bologna Process which resembles an original European policy has spread around the world effecting non-EU member states which chose to internalize and imitate the European "way of doing things". This case study aligns with Manners' theory on European "Procedural Ethics", claiming that the power of the EU on non-EU member states countries is demonstrated by the diffusion of norms and values not because of what the EU *do*, rather because of what the EU *is*. Bearing in mind that the Bologna Process was not originally designed to be a world-wide reform, it is astonishing to see how in the realist international relations, norms and values can be diffused globally by normative means only.

As an answer to the two main questions raised in the beginning of the paper, it can be said, firstly, that the EU act as a normative power in the international arena once it is managed to transfer its local-regional influence to the global sphere by forming a regime. By defining the Bologna Process which was launched as a regional "in-house" reform, as an international regime, one can draw the line between European norms and values to third countries' policies and preferences. Secondly, either thanks to its ideational leadership or to its financial support the Bologna Process shows that the EU does have the ability to influence third countries who voluntarily ask to bring their HESs to be compatible with the EHEA. The empirical difficulty scholars faced while trying to prove normative influence was solved with the definition of the EU as a global hegemon who controls the regional-international higher education regime.

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