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To cite this article: Hila Zahavi (2018): The Bologna Process in Israel as a reflection of EU-Israel relations, European Journal of Higher Education, DOI: [10.1080/21568235.2018.1561315](https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2018.1561315)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2018.1561315>



Published online: 29 Dec 2018.



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The Bologna Process in Israel as a reflection of EU-Israel relations

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to examine the Israeli perceptions towards the Bologna Process as well as outline its reactions to it. Specifically, the article investigates the landscape of interests among Israeli policy-makers (from both political and institutional levels) in relation to the European higher education reforms. Through interviews with policy-makers and a qualitative analysis of official documents and political discussions, the article also follows how the response to Bologna in Israel has developed, and how the Bologna Process was perceived in Israel. Relying on the theoretical frameworks of normative power and external perceptions, the article elaborates how the Bologna Process' trajectory in Israel reflects a wider picture of EU-Israeli relations, and Israeli perceptions of Europe and the EU. The study contributes to the discussion of the use of European higher education policies as a tool in foreign policy, as part of the tool kit of Europe's normative power. Thus, the article calls to enhance research of higher education and other 'soft policy' areas in the study of foreign policy and international relations.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 31 October 2018
Accepted 16 December 2018

KEYWORDS

Israel-EU relations; external perceptions; normative power; Bologna Process; higher education policies

Introduction

The Bologna model has generated interest in Israel among policy-makers and politicians, leading to official requests for full membership to the Process in 2007 and 2008. While Israel's requests were ultimately denied, it was granted observer status. Israel's affiliation to the Bologna Process (BP) is an interesting case because of its special relationship with Europe, which varies on a scale between strong economic, trade, and research relations, and complicated political relations. As this article will show, the Bologna path in Israel is telling for a wider understanding of the EU-Israel relationship, shedding light on how higher education (HE) permeates international relations.

The article will first introduce its theoretical framework: normative power and external perceptions studies. Following this section, the article will give some background on the BP, its Global Strategy and EU-Israel relations. The article will then present the path of the BP in Israel, by evaluating the initial responses and perceptions towards it, as well as the concrete implementation of the process at different levels. The article will conclude

with insights of the case study for the relevant theories, as well as for EU- Israeli relations more broadly.

Theoretical frameworks: normative power and external perceptions studies

The Normative Power theory relates to notions of non-military power (such as civilian power, soft power and ethical power). It can be defined as the ability of an actor to shape the perception of what is normal and proper, without using force but by attractive existence of the actor which makes others cooperate with it, and adapt it as a model (Manners 2006a, 168). While gaining interest in the fields of EU studies and international relations in the last two decades, the idea of normative power was present in their literature earlier. Its roots were developed already in Carr's work, which made the distinction between economic power, military power, and power over opinion (Carr 1962, 108). Relating to the EU's creation, Duchêne emphasised the 'idée force', which can be seen as an element of normative power in the political field (Duchêne 1972).

Based on official declarations and legislations of the EU's institutions, Manners lists what he calls the 'core norms'. These identify the normative aspects of the EU, in internal and external policies. Manners suggests that the EU's normative power stems from the diffusion of norms (Manners 2006b). Manners' idea was later developed by Diez, claiming that while the European normative power serves the EU's foreign policy and external relations, it is also used as a practice of 'discursive presentation' aimed to consolidate European identity (Diez 2005). This aspect of normative power is connected to the study of external perceptions, since an analysis of the ways in which 'other actors represent EU's sponsored norms, can provide insights into the EU's potential to play a role of a normative power' (Sicurelli 2015, 26). Relating this to the subject at hand, the ways in which non-European actors (like Israel) perceive the BP and its norms, can provide insight into the potential of the EU to lead and assert its normative power in the international arena of HE.

In the last decade, the study of external perceptions has been integrated into the fields of international relations and foreign policy, and EU studies in particular. As Lucarelli and Fioramonti explain, 'looking at external images means looking at one's variables that contributes to shaping a European political identity among Europeans. ... Self-rhetorical representation, public debates and mirror images are fundamental components of political identity in the making like the UE/ European one' (Lucarelli and Fioramonti 2009, 1). Various factors influence the process of identity building. One of them, and maybe the most important, is the relationship with external Others (Stråth 2002). The relevance of Others is appreciated in socio-psychological studies (Hall 1997) and international relations literature (Neumann 1998). 'Others' produce a 'mirror' for the self as an individual, but also for a group engaged in a self-identification process. Hence, images of the EU as seen by other actors can contribute to consolidate European identity, European self-perception, and European future internal and external policy (Lucarelli and Fioramonti 2009, 1–9). In the HE arena, the EU has become a rather strong player, with the creation and emergence of the BP and the EHEA. If the EU aspires to heighten its external influence (as Asderaki and Zahavi and Freidman's articles in this issue indicate), it cannot avoid taking into serious consideration the external expectations, images and perceptions towards it, the BP and the EHEA.

The theories of normative power and external perceptions have mostly been developed independently from each other with limited cross over ideas from one to another (Pardo 2015). Nevertheless, in recent years, scholars from both sides have started to relate to the complementary theoretical frameworks in different studies (Browning 2003; Diez 2005; Pardo 2015). Indeed, as this study supports, the theories complement and serve each other. Specifically, the normative power theory requires the definition of certain actors as ‘Others’, towards whom normative power will be activated (Browning 2003, 52; Diez 2005).

This article will apply these complementary theoretical frameworks in the case of HE, and more specifically, EU-Israel relations in the field of HE. This is not the first study to use the theory of normative power in the field of HE (Damro and Friedman 2018; Figueroa 2010; Hartmann 2008). Its innovation lies in its focus on international relations and foreign policy as well as its connection to the literature on external perceptions, and how these interact with normative power theories.

The scope of this article is limited to the ‘receiver’ of normative power (Israel in this case): how the actions, existence and policies of the EU in the field of HE are perceived by Israel, as an external entity. As such, the article does not go into detail surrounding the EU’s interests in activating its normative power, or how the norms are being diffused by different mechanisms, rather it is limited to examining certain aspects of external perceptions.

Research scope and method

This study examines how European HE policy developments in recent decades (specifically the BP) were perceived and discussed in Israel, and how they intersect with EU-Israel relations more broadly. To this end, the empirical analysis is based on twenty open interviews with policy-makers from relevant governmental and national authorities in Israel and the EU, as well as representatives of Israeli HE institutions, and institutional policy-makers. The research is also based on official documents and reports from Israeli national policy and political discussions. Both sources were analysed using qualitative content analysis, to form a contemporary historical analysis and describe the trajectory of the BP in Israel. Prior to outlining this trajectory, and the perceptions towards it – the following section sets the context of the BP, its Global Strategy and EU-Israel relations.

The Bologna Process and the global strategy

The BP aimed to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by harmonising higher education systems in Europe. Yet, it was not established as an EU process. Despite the initial objection of the signatory states, shortly after its launch, the BP was taken under the auspices of the EU. Today, The European Commission has full member status and the EU steers the BP through a few mechanisms, such as the Bologna Follow-up Groups (BFUG), which allows it to navigate the ‘Bologna ship’ towards the EU’s desirable directions (Keeling 2006, 203–23). Although the BP signatory countries do not correspond directly with EU membership, it is conceived (internally, but also externally) as an EU Process (Ibid). As discussed by both Zahavi and Friedman and Asderaki (this issue), the EU actively promotes the BP outside European borders. Therefore, this article will relate to the BP as an EU process, in terms of the EU’s foreign relations, interests and perceptions.

The BP had crossed the borders of Europe with its ‘Global Strategy’, setting a model for reform in HE for other parts of the world. Although the BP is managed by European bodies, and applied in European countries, it aspires to influence more than the HE systems in Europe. The intention of the global strategy is to promote the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area and increase cooperation with other parts of the world (Muche 2005). While the use of HE for domestic policy, especially in the European context, has been the focus of important research (Archer, Hutchings, and Ross 2005; Voegtle, Knill, and Dobbins 2011), its use by the EU as a foreign policy tool has been examined to a lesser degree (See Damro and Friedman 2018). This article aims to contribute to the conceptualisation of HE as a tool and reflection of foreign policy and foreign relations, through the example of the BP, and its permeation in the EU-Israeli relationship.

Israel-EU relations: a brief overview

The Israeli-EU relationship started on a positive footing when Israel was one of the first countries to engage in dialogue with the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1959, Israel and the European Community formally established full diplomatic relations (Pardo and Peters 2010, 1–4). Yet, despite this early interest, relations between Israel and the EU in these early years did not develop much further, with Israel behaving ‘more as an island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean than a Mediterranean country neighboring the European Continent’ (Dror and Pardo 2006, 10; Pardo and Peters 2010, 1). Over the decades, Israel and the EU have strengthened their ties, with the relations between them developing into a complex form, which can be described as dual: mostly positive and strong on the practical dimensions (trade, economic cooperation, research and development, tourism, etc.), but much more complex and moderate on the political and declarative levels (Del Sarto 2011; Pardo and Peters 2010).

The EU-Israel relationship: the political level

On the political declarative level, the EU-Israel relationship was very much influenced by the EU’s desire to form a common stance towards the Middle East and the Israeli-Arab conflict, starting in the early 1970s. Through its issuing of the Venice Declaration (1980), the EEC expressed its aspiration to play a greater role in the Israeli-Arab conflict¹ (Harpaz and Shamis 2010, 584–85; Pardo and Peters 2010, 6–8). The Venice Declaration marked a turning point in Israeli-European relations, adding a charged political undertone, which would cast a shadow over the relationship throughout the 1980s (Pardo and Peters 2010, 7–9).

With the launch of Middle East Peace Process in the 1990s, the EU asserted a more positive attitude towards Israel and the peace process through a series of declarations and practical steps² (Harpaz and Shamis 2010, 585). Following the peace process developments during the 1990s and 2000s, the EU and Israel continued to develop their relationship on both declarative and practical levels. These developments led to the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), as political frameworks for the consolidation of EU-Israel relations (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005). Yet, this more positive tone in EU-Israeli relations ended with the Israeli military operation ‘Cast Lead’ in Gaza in December 2008 (followed by other Israeli military operations in Gaza in 2012 and 2014). Since then, the relations on the

political and declarative level have deteriorated, with both sides' political leaderships moving further away from each other's positions.

The EU-Israeli relationship in practice: economic, trade and 'technical' relations

As mentioned, the EU-Israeli relationship carries a dual quality. Contrary to the political dimension, from a practical level, the relationship has developed positively throughout the years, creating an increasing cooperation in economy, trade, science, technology, and culture (Pardo and Peters 2010, 2). The first trade agreement between the EEC and Israel was signed in 1964, followed by a new five-year trade agreement, signed in 1970. In 1975, the EC and Israel signed their first free trade area agreement, eventually replaced in 1995 by the Association Agreement (Gordon and Pardo 2015, 270). Since 1996, Israel is the first non-EU country, to become a full member of the European Research Area, participating in the Frameworks Programmes for Research and Technological Development (today, Horizon 2020) (Dror and Pardo 2006, 11). These developments reflect areas beyond trade and economics, in which both parties are interested in closer cooperation.

In recent years, Israel has signed numerous agreements with the EU and joined its various frameworks for collaboration such as the Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) in 2012, and the Open Skies Agreement in 2013. These cases reflect how the EU and Israel upgrade their relations with different legal agreements directed to increase trade and economic cooperation between partners and to encourage economic growth in both parties. These various agreements and cooperative frameworks are not purely technical. They carry normative, declarative and political aspects in their various articles.³ Thus, the agreements mark a flourishing sphere for EU-Israeli relations on practical levels, yet are not completely detached from the political declarative normative aspects which can be observed in their wording. Today the economic relations between Israel and the EU are thriving, with the EU representing Israel's largest and most important trade partner (Central Bureau of Statistics 2018; Pardo and Peters 2010, 2). Hence, the duality in the Israeli-EU relations; between flourishing practical/technical aspects, and challenging relations on the declared political level. This duality which has been examined by a number of scholars, (Del Sarto 2011; Gordon and Pardo 2015) is also evident in the case of the higher education – as evidenced below.

In light of the above described developments in the Israeli-EU relationship, the next section will outline their relations in the field of HE. Specifically, the section aims to provide an outline of the BP in Israel, how it was perceived by both political and institutional actors, as well as the degree to which its ideas were diffused in the Israeli HE system. This examination will shed light on the close, however complicated relations, through the prism of higher education, reflecting on their dualism and complexity.

The trajectory of the Bologna Process in Israel

Initial reactions and perceptions: a top-down perspective

It would take a few years for Israeli governmental bodies to relate to the BP. The first time an official reference to the BP was made, was in 2005 (and later in 2006) within Knesset (Israeli parliament) discussions (Knesset 2005, 2006). In both cases, the BP was not the

primary subject of the discussion but a side reference to the issue of recognition of academic degrees. Similar references were made later in 2007 and 2008 during Knesset discussions on Antisemitism in Europe and the issue of academic boycotts on Israel (Knesset 2007, 2008). Thus, while the BP was developing in Europe and beyond, it had yet to be publicly discussed by Israeli officials. This reflects a low level of interest of Israeli leadership towards the BP, and the perception of the BP as a non-relevant issue. The turning point of Israeli perceptions towards the BP was when Prof. Yuli Tamir, as the Minister of Education (2006–2009), saw the potential of the BP for Israel and applied for membership.

Israel's application for membership in the BP came about as an initiative of the advisor to the Council for Higher Education (CHE) together with the head of the European Desk at the Manufacturers Association of Israel. Motivated by the idea that it is in Israel's best interest to belong to the club of European HE, their initiative was passed on to the Director General of CHE, and to the then Minister of Education.⁴ The decision to join the BP ensued, even though it was understood that Israel did not satisfy the eligibility criteria.⁵ Two official applications were made in 2007 and 2008, through the Foreign Ministry, and supported by other national governmental bodies (including the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Planning and Budgeting Committee at CHE).⁶ This reflects a joint awakening of the Israeli political echelon, towards the developments of the European HE reforms. Israel's applications were nevertheless rejected based on technical issues.⁷

Several themes can be discerned relating to the motivations of the Israeli political echelon to apply for membership status to the BP, as evidenced through the analysis of the interviews.⁸ These include: gaining exposure to the world, enhancing Israeli HE, and conducting a dialogue and partnership with Europe. The theme of exposure to the world was attributed to both academic exposure and a wider exposure leading to links in other fields. The main idea is openness to the world: Israel 'must learn to live not as a nation that dwells alone'.⁹

In light of the perceived importance of academic ties with Europe facilitated by the BP, Israel proactively tried to achieve these goals in various ways. For instance, in 2008 Israel signed a convention for collaboration between the Israeli Education Ministry and the European Commission (the 'Jan Figel Convention'). The objective of the convention was to 'enhance policy dialogue on greater compatibility of education systems and to increase educational mobility and exchanges' (EC 2008). One of the immediate results of this collaboration agreement was that since 2009, Israel is represented at the senior level in the Bologna Policy Forum. On a practical level, the senior political/bureaucratic echelons of the Israeli government have remained involved and aware of developments occurring in the European HE sphere. Here we see how normative aspects and dialogue are taking form in frameworks, which might on the surface seem purely technical. A convention with the aim of promoting students' mobility among parties, opens a stage for normative influence through dialogue, presence, and more. One of the interviewees related specifically to this potential:

I see Europe as a very important partner for Israel on all levels. ... I think that in the network of relationships there is more than simply the academic ties; there is also a set of values that is part of the picture, and there is no doubt that Israel (which is not Europe, but does perhaps claim to have the values of a European society) has the ability to integrate and work together [with Europe].¹⁰

This quote demonstrates the potential of dialogue and the related normative aspects of the EU programmes to act as a bridge to overcome difficulties in the relationship and strengthen ties with Europe. This idea was commonly cited in the interviews conducted. The fact that interviewees were relating directly to the effect of European values and norms through technical frameworks and dialogue, demonstrates the potential activation of normative power.

Although these developments are significant on a declarative-level, and even for agenda setting, none of the above developments resulted in any actual implementation of aspects of the BP in Israeli institutions of HE. That said, the initiation of the adoption of BP's components did occur. Parallel to the developments described above, Israel was drawing closer to Europe in the field of HE through EU programmes closely associated to the BP. Since 2007, Israel has been a partner in the Erasmus Mundus programme (later included in Erasmus+), a framework for student and faculty mobility between European countries and countries affiliated with the European Neighbourhood Policy. A year later, Israel became a partner in the Tempus programme (later merged into Erasmus+), which was intended to promote HE reforms in countries outside Europe and bring them close to the BP (EACEA 2010; Keeling 2006). Israel's partnership in the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus programmes exposed Israeli HE institutions to the ideas of the BP, and obliged them to learn the BP terms to 'speak the same language', in some cases the participation of the Israeli HE institutions in European HE programmes led to pilots and even implementation of Bologna components, mostly ECTS and learning outcomes.¹¹

As a result of Israel's partnership in European HE programmes, a Tempus office (today, the Erasmus+ office) was opened in Israel in 2008, under the auspice of CHE and funded by the EU, as a branch of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, an agency of the European Commission). One of office's tasks is to run the Forum of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) as a means to introduce the BP to HE stakeholders and institutions in Israel, through local agents holding managerial positions in HE institutions appointed to the Forum.

During this time, Israel joined additional European HE agencies and networks, which promote the BP.¹² Through these different professional frameworks and agreements, Israel is currently in a process of assimilating various elements of the BP (such as learning outcomes) into its HE system. Moreover, the fact that Israel continues to join these kinds of frameworks and agreements, shows that the positive perceptions of Israeli politicians, officials and policy-makers towards European higher education reforms were not reflecting a temporary or personal attitude, but were part of a wider sustained perception. This development strengthened the European presence in the Israeli HE sphere and the Israeli presence in European HE forums, promoting dialogue and normative effects.

Although the assimilation of certain elements of the BP to the Israeli system were promoted at the national level, a large-scale implementation of the reforms was not adopted. Following its unsuccessful attempts to join the BP in 2007 and 2008, Israel seems to have abandoned its membership aspirations on the national level. According to the interviews conducted for this research, once Israel did not have an external commitment to the Process, there was no reason to continue to introduce it in a formal way, especially given that over the years Israel was a partner in many European research frameworks and student exchange programmes. As one of the interviewees observed: 'we are getting the good side of Europe without being involved in the problems'.¹³ For the national

leadership, this reduced the value of the membership in the club. The strained political dynamic between Israel and the EU was also mentioned as an explanation with one interviewee stating, ‘relations with the EU have become increasingly political, and in Israel no one distinguished the Council of Europe from the EU, they were all in the same basket’.¹⁴

In 2013, when the Erasmus+ programme was launched, Israel was given the opportunity to become a full partner. After discussions on the ministerial level, Israel decided not to join the programme on a full basis but to retain the status of associate membership (and avoid paying membership fees).¹⁵ This demonstrates again how the Israeli national leadership abandoned the idea of assimilation with the EHEA instead deciding to remain within the second circle of beneficiaries and involvement.

From a top-down to a bottom-up approach

After the rejection of Israel’s second application to join the BP, political-level discussions surrounding the reforms and its ramifications for the Israeli higher-education system largely wavered. Yet, the initial political interest was in many ways replaced by an institutionally-led interest towards the BP. Indeed, the wavering of interest on the national-political level made it possible for the institutions themselves to take the reins and spark the reform processes from below.

As observed through the analysis of the interviews, there was an increasing international pressure on Israeli academic institutions to learn about the BP in order to weave ties with European institutions for student exchanges, and to expand the odds of being granted EU-funded projects. This pressure began to have a noticeable effect during the first half of the current decade, when the institutions began to approach the BP through a bottom-up approach (as arose in a CHE discussion on October 22, 2012). Another aspect of this bottom-up trend involves the European higher education programmes mentioned above. All of the European programmes that Israel joined, which are managed and funded by the EU, are intended to promote the BP outside the EU, either on the national or the institutional level. They do so in diverse ways, as one of the interviewees described:

The immediate motivation [to join Bologna] was the start of a period of international academic ties ... this is not possible if the systems do not understand each other or speak the same language. ... that is, if we cannot meet the technical demands, we cannot enter the pitch and play the game. That was the trigger that sparked the process. Over time, many of us [officials of the Israeli higher-education system] began to understand that this process has many valuable elements that can change the higher-education system for the better.¹⁶

This trend continued with the Erasmus+ programme, which helped diffuse the BP from the institutional level, bottom-up, by encouraging Israeli institutions to get acquainted with the BP features.¹⁷ This resulted in many pilots and even full implementation of Bologna components in different Israeli HE institutions: mostly related to learning outcomes, but also ECTS and even diploma supplements. Thus, while the effect of the European HE programmes was driven from the top – through the signing of programmes – it generated a bottom-up approach, driven by institutional policy-makers to promote the BP in the institutions and then in the entire system.

One of the factors promoting the bottom-up support of the BP in Israeli HE institutions was the increasing trend of internationalisation of HE, in which the BP has become an international standard and even prerequisite. Dr. Ami Shalit, the academic secretary of the Feinberg Academy at the Weizmann Institute of Science, explained this as follows: ‘The lack of compatibility with the Bologna Process will impair the ability of Israeli scholars and institutions of higher education to collaborate with foreign institutions, including to win research grants and the like’ (Bashaar Forum Conference 2012). Another factor contributing to this development was the Bologna Training Center, founded in 2012 an independent national resource centre on the BP, under the auspices of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. It was intended to assist Israeli institutions to understand the BP, the possibilities it offers them, and how they can partially implement it on the institutional level.¹⁸ These developments emphasise the leadership role taken by HE institutions to promote the BP in Israel. These two factors reflect the positive perceptions and interests of Israeli policymakers on the institutional level towards the BP and EHEA. Thus, the interest and positive perceptions were not limited to the national governmental sphere but arose on the institutional level as well.

To sum up the discussion on the bottom-up approach: the discourse focuses on strengthening the international dimension of HE in Israel, the potential for improved quality it bears, and its economic potential (in terms of EU funded projects in research and in HE, and in term of student mobility as an economic resource). Nevertheless, the BP is far from being applied on both the institutional and national levels, and many of its elements are still not addressed properly. Nevertheless, as the globalisation of HE intensifies, and as Israeli access to European funding programmes increases, the Israeli higher-education system is drawing closer and closer to Europe, in a process that begins at the institutional level and radiates upward.

In September 2018 a new Twinning project was launched in the Israeli Ministry of Education, with the objective to establish the Israeli National Qualification Framework (EEAS 2018). This may reflect a renewed interest of the Israeli policy-makers in the BP and EHEA, in contradiction with the later developments since the rejection of Israel’s application, which was framed as bottom-up, led by the HE institutions.

Bologna’s Israeli trajectory: external perceptions and normative power

Despite the limited political attention paid to the BP in Israel in the years following the country’s membership rejections, it did not lack influence on the Israeli system. As the above trajectory exemplifies, the perceptions and reactions to the BP in Israel shifted from the political-national scale to a more bottom-up approach initiated by the academic institutions themselves. While the national level’s interest stagnated after the membership rejections, the institutions themselves showed increased interest in the process out of their pragmatic reasons and motivation for internationalisation. One should wonder whether Israel loses or gains from its current bottom-up approach, led by the institutions, and not by the national official level.

We can track several reasons for the Israeli interest in the BP, both from the national and institutional levels, which should be linked to the Israeli perceptions towards the BP and European HE. The first reasoning is related to the concept of Israel’s need to open up

to the world and increase its international cooperation ('not as a nation that dwells alone'). In this regard, the BP and Europe are perceived in a positive light as a bridge to reach other parts of the world and thus as a prominent actor in the global arena.

The second reasoning is related to the 'international officials'. This reasoning sees the BP as a way to promote international norms in a local arena, and overcome local obstacles, through the acceptance of international standards, networks and norms. In the case of the BP in Israel, local officials saw the BP as an opportunity to promote needed reforms such as inter-institutional recognition, by imposing European norms on the Israeli HE institutions and HE system. Hence, the BP and European HE are perceived as a positive force to promote quality and normative aspects.

Another reasoning is the realisation that the process has started, and it cannot be ignored at this point. This realisation stresses that BP is perceived as relevant and powerful process which cannot be overlooked, since it had an effect of the international arena of HE.

The fourth reasoning is related to the agenda of HE internationalisation. The BP was perceived as answering many of the needs related to the process of internationalisation of HE. Again, this shows a recognition and acceptance to the prominent role which the EU and Europe lead in the global arena of HE.

The last significant reasoning is related to the issue of quality. The BP, if completed, was perceived as able to enhance the quality of Israeli HE. This reflects a very positive perception of the essence of the project as a way to promote quality in HE. In addition, this reflects a positive perception of Europe as a force for good in the world, and as an actor which helps others enhance quality aspects of their performances. The above reasonings reflect an overall positive perception of the EU as a dominant actor in the international arena of HE. Moreover, these perceptions are closely related to normative issues as revealed through the interviews.

According to the Normative Power theory, norms can be diffused in various ways. From the above analysis, we can recognise different methods of diffusion in the current case. *Contagion* is the diffusion of norms, resulting from 'unintentional diffusion of ideas from the EU to other political actors' (Manners 2002, 244). From the interviews, we observe that the actual existence of the BP activated interest among Israeli policymakers, which perceived its ideas and norms in a positive manner. *Procedural diffusion* 'which involves the institutionalization of a relationship between the EU and a third party' (Ibid) is present in the case of the BP in Israel through agreements (such as the Jan Figel convention, EC 2008) and EU programmes as described above. *Informational diffusion*, 'the result of the range of strategic communications' (Manners 2002, 244) appears in this case as calls for applications for EU programmes promoting the BP and public reports of the EU to track the implementation of the BP in neighbouring countries (EACEA 2010). *Transference diffusion*, which 'takes place when the EU exchanges goods, trade, aid or technical assistance with third parties through largely substantive or financial means' (Manners 2002, 245) appears in this case in the activation of EU HE programmes such as Erasmus+, which provide not only training and technical assistance, but also financial aid. *Overt diffusion*, which 'occurs as a result of the physical presence of the EU in third states' (Manners 2002, 245) is evident in our case in the establishment of the Tempus offices/ Erasmus+ offices, as a branch of the EACEA and the European Commission, physically inside the offices of CHE. *Cultural filter*, which 'affects the impact of international norms and political learning in third states and organisations

leading to learning, adaptation or ejection of norms' (Manners 2002, 245), was reflected in the interviews which specifically mentioned the normative effect of the EU and BP on the Israeli field of HE. Hence, the case of the BP in Israel is indicative of the norms diffusion discussed in the normative power theory.¹⁹ As demonstrated earlier, the Israeli echelon was aware of the normative aspect of the BP, its promotion in Israel by the EU, and its potential to affect EU-Israeli relations.

Bologna's trajectory in Israel and implications for EU-Israel relations

Thus far, this article has discussed EU-Israel relations through the prism of HE. It would be valuable to turn to examining how this relates to a broader understanding of international relations and how the HE sphere in particular can shed light on the study of foreign policy. First, perceptions are fluid, constantly changing and affected by various influences. Thus, perceptions related to a specific area can affect and relate to perceptions and relations in other spheres (Moisio et al. 2013). This notion was evidenced in many of the interviews conducted for this research – through which the HE connection was understood as facilitating relations in other domains.²⁰

As discussed above, the adoption of the BP in Israel is highly selective characterised by the embracement and application of the more positive features, less costly aspects, and the exclusion of costly aspects, with no set commitment to implement the process as a whole. A number of the Israeli interviewees mentioned that this scenario is a fair representation of EU-Israel relations. Indeed, Israel rather stay within the second circle of affiliation with European processes, networks, and programmes. Thus, enjoying most of the fruits without the need to pay the full price or fully commit to adjust to the European norms as a whole.

The response of the Israeli HE system to the BP reveals the duality in Israel-Europe relations, between the applied and pragmatic aspects and the normative and declaratory aspects (Del Sarto 2011; Gordon and Pardo 2015). This can be linked to the functionalist approach in EU's internal and external policies, as described in the past (Haas 1958; Mitrany 1994).²¹ These trends and duality also appear in other fields of EU-Israeli relations throughout the years, as shown above.

There were two factors at play in the initial motivation for Israel to join the BP: a practical-utilitarian motive and a normative motive. The practical utilitarian motive sees advancing the Israeli HE system on the international scene and opening the Israeli HE market to new groups from the rest of the world. The normative motive relates partly to an identity-related motive: 'Israel must learn to live not as a "nation that dwells alone" but as part of the family of nations'.²² Both motives see the BP and Europe in a positive light and reflects normative aspects of the relations. Hence, the example of the BP in Israel demonstrates a successful case of European normative power, related primary to a positive external perception. This finding runs counter to other studies showing the failure of European normative power in the case of Israel (Gordon and Pardo 2015). Thus, HE has a potential positive normative influence, which should be further researched for academic and policy purposes. In addition, it would be valuable to further study the application of normative power as a European foreign policy tools in other fields in Israel in order to better understanding the mechanism in this geo-political context.

As arose above, Israeli leadership, representing both institutional and national scales, perceived the BP and the European leadership in HE in a very positive way: as a global leader of trends, a promoter of quality, and an overall force for good. The fact that the normative aspect was a crucial part of the discussion and perceptions on the BP raises the potential of viewing European HE policies as a tool in foreign policy, as part of the tool kit of Europe's normative power. Granted, this is not traditional foreign policy. However, the EU is not a traditional actor in the international arena, thus it is not surprising if the tools it uses (or should use) are non-traditional, and related to non-traditional fields to IR.

This study has demonstrated how interests are mixed with technical issues as well as political considerations, producing a multi-dimensional situation. The relations between Israel and Europe consist of pragmatic issues, guided primarily by economic interests but also relating to normative aspects, motivated by considerations of foreign relations and the discourse of norms and identities. This discussion is relevant not only for HE, but for all domains making-up the Israeli-EU relationship.

Notes

1. The Venice Declaration outlined some of the principles defining the EU's vision towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until today. It was perceived by Israel at the time as anti-Israeli, because of the recognition of the Palestinian right for self-determination, and other issues regarding the conflict (Pardo and Peters 2010, 6–9).
2. In the Essen European Council of December 1994, the European Council expressed its willingness to establish special relations with Israel, declaring that it 'considers that Israel, on account of its high level of economic development, should enjoy special status in the relations with the EU'.
3. For example: Article 2 of the Association Agreement states: 'Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles ...' (European Council 2000, art. 2).
4. As described in interviews conducted with an Israeli policy-maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel; a former advisor to CHE, 16.12.2014, Israel; a former high-ranking Israeli politician, 20.3.2016, Israel.
5. Israel is not a member of the Council of Europe and hence does not meet the conditions for membership.
6. As detailed in an interview conducted with former high-ranking Israeli politician, 20.3.2016, Israel.
7. Israel's official applications to join the BP were rejected because Israel is not a member of the Council of Europe and hence does not meet the conditions for membership. The leading officials considered positively joining the Council of Europe to overcome this obstacle. However, political pressure from the USA prevented Israel's aspiration to do so. To join the Council of Europe, Israel had to sign the European Cultural Convention. The United States refused to sign the convention and pressured Israel not to sign as well, since the convention was perceived as recognising the rights of indigenous peoples, which could have led to a political and territorial interpretation by the Palestinians in the Israeli context, and other minorities in other geo-political contexts.
8. Interviews with: Senior policy-maker in an Israeli university, 6.3.2016, Israel; senior researcher of HE policies and advisor to HE institutions and governmental bodies in Israel, 18.6.2015, Israel; Israeli policy-maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel; a former advisor to CHE, 16.12.2014, Israel; an Israeli former high-ranking politician, 20.3.2016, Israel.
9. Interview conducted with Israeli policy-maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel.

10. Interview conducted with Israeli policy-maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel.
11. Interview conducted with a senior policy-maker in an Israeli university, 6.3.2016, Israel.
12. Israel is a member of the ENIC-NARIC network (represented by the Ministry of Education). Israel is also a signatory of the 1997 Lisbon Convention on the recognition of professional and academic studies (ratified in 2007) (National Council for Research and Development 2010, 156–60). Another framework of this kind is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, in which Israel is an associate member (represented by CHE) (ENQA, ENQA website).
13. Interview conducted with an Israeli former high-ranking politician, 20.3.2016, Israel.
14. Interview conducted with Israeli policy-maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel.
15. Interview conducted with an Israeli diplomat, 24.3.2015, Belgium.
16. Interview conducted with a senior policy-maker in an Israeli university, 6.3.2016, Israel.
17. In 2008, as part of the Tempus programme (the previous name of the Erasmus+ programme), 32 Israeli academic institutions participated in 18 projects for a total of more than €10 million. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of projects with Israeli participation grew threefold: in 2013, there were applications by 27 projects involving Israeli education institutions. As of the same year, 577 Israeli students and faculty members had taken part in the Erasmus Mundus exchange programme.
18. See the Bologna Training Center website. The Bologna Training Center conducted tens of workshops in different universities and colleges in Israel, mostly focused on implementation of learning outcomes, ECTS and the diploma supplement. The Bologna Training Center guided many institutions and departments in their efforts to apply these components.
19. Larsen (2014) indicated the overlap of external perceptions and normative power.
20. Interviews with Israeli policy maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel; senior researcher of HE policies and advisor to HE institutions and governmental bodies in Israel, 18.6.2015, Israel
21. This idea was described in past research dealing with Israel-EU relation in the field of knowledge policies (Steinberg 1988).
22. Interview conducted with Israeli policy-maker in a governmental economic authority, 28.12.2014, Israel.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, as part of the NEAR EU Jean Monnet Network. The author greatly acknowledges the interviewees who enabled the conduction of this research, and Dr. Yoav Friedman for his assistance in conducting the interviews. The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, the editors, and Dr. Hannah Moscovitz for their suggestions and constructive comments, Mr. Moshe Amir for laying the groundwork for this research, and Prof. Sharon Pardo for his faithful guidance and support.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This research was conducted with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, as part of the NEAR EU Jean Monnet Network [Grant number 573536-EPP-1-2016-1-IL-EPPJMO-NETWORK]; European Commission [Grant number 2016-1737].

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