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

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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. This paper uses Regime Theory as a conceptual base which enables a very comprehensive explanation for the creation, institutionalization, function and growth of international cooperation, through which the EU conveys its global political and normative influence. By pinpointing a mechanism in which regional reform turns into an international regime, the paper wishes to shed a light on the moment when regional becomes global, and Europe turns from a dwarf to a giant.

**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. The term was coined by Ian Manners, who defined the EU as an entity which is "able to shape conceptions of 'normal' in international relations". 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), meaning to define its 'actorness' by its character. The theory argues that the EU is able to determine one's standards and preferences by the proliferation of its own norms without the use coercion means. While claiming for normative action, the NPE theory suggests diffusion of globally applicable principles, which perceived as legit thanks to their universality.

Accepting this concept brings two pivotal questions to the floor – First, the question of success; does the EU indeed achieve its goals while acting as a normative leader? And second, what makes actors in the global arena subjected to European normative power?

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 realist thinkers have criticized the theory claiming that Europe has no ability to bring non-European countries to apply European norms without the use of military or economic means.

Although still debated, the validity of normative influence is indeed difficult to be spotted in "hard" policy areas. Yet, by examining case studies taken from "softer" policy areas, I claim that a normative influence can be demonstrated. In these areas the importance of being part of an "International Community" brings actors to internalize external values and norms because they are perceived as universally legitimate. This understanding narrows the distance between the concept of Europe as a normative power, to Europe as an international hegemon in certain issue-areas.

In 2011, Thomas Diez stood on this very stage and linked normative elements in the EU international behavior with the Gramcian concept of "Hegemony". This link enables to grasp "normative power" as a complement component of the concept of hegemony. I will take on Diez's idea and show how the EU behaves as a global hegemon in the field of higher education.

**The Bologna Process**

The Bologna process, launched in 1999, aiming at creating the European Higher Education Area: a region in which all national higher education systems built on common architecture. The process reflects the pan-European need to find answers for mutual problems such as lack of reciprocal recognition of degrees and qualifications, low employability rate of graduates and mobility barriers caused by incompatibility among national higher education systems.

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 long path of European integration, for a new policy area is being regulated super-nationally by the EU.

During its first years, the Bologna Process was developed to provide policy solutions for regional problems mutual to the *European* countries. But it was relatively fast when countries outside of Europe started to show interest in the Process, for the policy tools that were developed and implemented in Europe were applicable also for non-European countries.

It was in 2003 when Bologna Process' Berlin Communique' presented the concepts of external "Openess" and "cooperation" to the "missions list" of the process. Adding an "external dimension" hinted on the explicit global normative nature of the process. The global turn of the process was institutionalized with the establishment of the "External Dimension Working Group" for the development of a method by which the Bologna Process would be implemented outside of the EHEA. Two years later, the ministers participated in Bergen ministerial meeting formally embedded the external dimension into the Process' action-lines. In order to maintain the momentum of spreading, the external dimension was further developed and deepened; in the following ministerial meeting, Leuven 2009, the "External Dimension" was already the main issue on the agenda.

Following the Leuven communique, another working group was established entitled: "International Openess – the European Higher Education Area in Global Context". In addition, a "Bologna Policy Forum" was established, as an arena where outsider interested bodies can discuss and contribute to Bologna's policy shaping process.

The concluding report of the "international openess" working group underlined the transformation that the Bologna Process has gone through, from aiming to increase the competitiveness of the European HE system, to a "partner" for other regional HE systems. The meaning is that countries outside the EHEA responded to the Bologna Process, demonstrating how a process initiated in Europe becomes a globally accepted/debated policy. For example: "the Brisbane declaration" in Australia, the debate over the national response to the Bologna Process in Canada and even the establishment of the Bologna Training Centre in Israel. These examples demonstrate the process of international policy convergence.

**International cooperation, policy convergence and regime formation**

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

Taking the vastly cited definition of Regime by Krasner, as “Implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations”, The Bologna Process can be seen as a good example of an international regime. Even if not initially planned as such, the Bologna process has a regime like nature for the process is a declaration-based treaty backed by a European-led secretariat, monitored by a benchmarking mechanism, which provides an international public good in shape of a framework for global internationalization policy of higher education.

Conceptualizing the Bologna Process as a regime signals that there is order in higher education policy, which is dictated by a global leader. As being the entity that funds and steers 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 what could be called the Europeanization of global higher education.

**The Israeli case**

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

While Israeli research is vastly internationalized, the system itself, in the sense of teaching and learning is relatively local. This can be said to be due to the relatively low rate of foreign student and faculty coming to study and teach in Israel, and low rate of Israeli students who combine international experience in their studies. In recent years, it is evident that Israeli academia makes efforts to bridge this gap and 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 went in two trajectories – formal and informal. Formally, the Israeli council for higher education started to show interest in the BP in 2006, when it witnessed the benefits European countries gain by harmonising their HESs. In 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 signatory member at the Bologna declaration. The following year Israel re-applied, and was declined again for the same reasons, yet received an observatory status.

After it was declined for the second time, Israel didn't take any formal measure to follow the process' evolution and development, yet on the other hand, a bottom-up informal process of "getting closer to Europe" started to arise by Israeli HEIs themselves. 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. These frameworks were grasped by the Israeli HEIs as mechanisms able to 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 compatibility with several Bolognian elements as it is a member at the European Network for Quality Assurance, advancing the articulation of an Israeli Diploma Supplement, growth of interest by leading Israeli universities and colleges in adjusting their credit system with the ECTS, using Learning Outcomes methodology Etc. Moreover, a "Bologna Training Center" was established in 2012 as a national center dealing with the BP in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Hence, although Israel is not a party to the Bologna Process, it still has an important influence on the Israeli HES.

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 membrane and brings to European influence at third countries: as in fact, a reform is undertaken in Israel following exposure to European influence, via normative mechanisms without any use of coercive means.

**Conclusion**

Although heavily critiqued 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*es, rather because of what the EU *is*. Baring in mind that the Bologna Process was not originally designed to be a world-wide reform, it is astonishing to see how norms and values can be diffused globally by normative means only.