

Sibel Burçer & Ilze Kangro

Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Latvia and Turkey: Its Management and Development during the Last Decade

Abstract

This paper aims at examining internationalization in higher education in two countries: Latvia and Turkey. The analysis is based on three dimensions of internationalization: institutional, organizational, and educational. Recently, under the influence of global processes, the internationalization takes form through the perspectives of three ideologies: idealism, instrumentalism, and educationalism. Institutional internationalization in both countries is mainly based on Bologna Process in European perspective. In other words, Bologna Process is to employ education for other purposes than education, that is, European identity. It is therefore that internationalization of higher education in both countries refers to the ideology of instrumentalism, as in many other member countries. This study reveals that both countries need a strategic planning of internationalization that also responds their own needs, while the countries are not alike in details. It may be predicted that many other member states are in the same position. Therefore, the comparative analysis points to the need for bilateral working bodies in exchange of experience and knowledge in order to develop a better understanding of internationalization for both individual states and for Bologna Process as a whole. Such studies can be done by academics as a complementary to the work of governing bodies.

Keywords: internationalization, Erasmus, instrumentalism, institution, academic exchange, student exchange

Introduction: Meanings of internationalization in higher education

This paper is to discuss internationalization in higher education in the context of two countries taking part in Erasmus Program. The discussion will focus on three dimensions of internationalization: institutional, organizational, and educational. Institutional dimension in this paper refers to the activities of the governing bodies in both countries. Organizational dimension informs how the members of the academic staff respond to the institutional dimensions, in the sense of mobility. And thirdly, student mobility will be considered. Both countries will be examined in their perspective of their internationalization practice in regard to the programs developed, or under development. The countries are chosen only because of the author's experience in them, as a Turkish citizen grown up in her home country, and as a PhD student at the University of Latvia. The need for comparison is based on the idea that data comparing all the countries, provided by European Commission and Bologna Process, are very much helpful, but too general to focus on details and challenges that fewer countries confront. Such comparisons can be helpful for developing bilateral cooperation and mutual exchange of experience that may contribute to the other. Rather than depending on unidirectional relationship between the central governing bodies of each member state, mutual relations between member states may help improve Bologna Process as a whole. In addition, Bologna Process may not be the only program that states follow. Member states may

be in pursuit of other ways, as is the case with Latvia and Turkey. So, information about experience of the other may be inspiring.

Governmental institutes have recently become involved in internationalization of higher education and have produced policies for the organizations to be more international. This is the ideological-political dimension of educational internationalization. On one hand, the governments of the developing countries support and encourage students to study abroad, and promote national higher education to attract more international students on the other. This is rather a prestigious attempt than the one for immediate benefit (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 293). Institutional policies also include affiliations with international higher education organizations.

The internationalization of higher education has rapidly become subject to several approaches. It has recently been argued that another dimension of internationalization is presence and the number of international academics included in the faculty (Leporia, Seeber & Bonaccorsi, 2015). Leporia, Seeber & Bonaccorsi (2015)'s research has revealed that county-related factors are more important than organization in attracting international academics, which implies its conjunction with high-skilled human resources.

There are attempts to identify underpinning ideologies of internationalization of higher education. Stier (2004) argues that there are three ideologies behind the internationalization endeavour: idealism, involved in creating a better world through development of mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance; instrumentalism, availing higher education institutions to the needs of policy makers that look for ensuring economic growth and sustainability through internationalization of higher education, which is regarded as a major means; educationalism, employing internationalization to enrich the education of individuals' learning and learning processes. It is obvious that all three have pros and cons, and none can be found alone in the internationalization of higher education in a country. These ideologies are also in rivalry. But, they can arise in a combination, depending on the dominance and agreement among the stakeholders in a country.

The internationalization of higher education in Latvia and Turkey during the last decade will be discussed in this essay in reference to the following concepts: institutional undertakings (international affiliations of the governing bodies in both countries); organizational responses (responses of academic units to internationalization); academics (initiatives for academics such as embracement of international staff in the teaching body, and potential to gain international experience); individual propensity of academics for international affiliation to international organizations; institutional regulations / academic responses; students (programs developed for national students to gain international learning experience; programs developed for international students to gain learning experience in the hosting country). The ideologies discussed above will be referred to as perspective provider to the data collected in the two countries.

Institutional regulations and internationalization

Bologna Process is the main delineation for both countries that has a European framework as a perspective determinant, whose philosophy is based on harmonization of structural features of higher education in EU member states. A

main objective of the Process is to enrich the European citizenship for challenges of the new millennium (EHEA, 1999). It has however provided a playground for both countries that ignited the search for a broader internationalization.

The ideology of instrumentalism seems to play important role in both countries. In Latvia, attracting international students is viewed as a response to the phenomenon of population aging, as stated in the interview of Ivsina (2016) with the representative at the Ministry of Education. But, lack of internationalization strategy and legislative restrictions on the programs thought in English at Latvian universities were underlined as the main challenges of Latvian perspective. In addition, a survey conducted about a decade ago revealed that an increasing number of Latvian Erasmus students were positive about career building in another European country (Rivža, n.d.), which may lead to the loss of local qualified workforce, while trying to gain international flow to Latvian society. Instrumentalism in Turkey takes the form of response to global competition solely at the moment, since there is no population ageing phenomenon. But, the officer of Bologna Process whom I interviewed highlighted that lack of internationalization strategy and of language skills among the students create barriers to take the advantage of young population in the global perspective (Laçin, 2016). Both cases imply that instrumentalism as the underlying ideology cannot be standalone and should be supported by policies relevant to education.

Turkey

The Bologna Process was carried out by Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in Turkey, the central authority for 194 higher education units. Turkey has developed a National Qualification Framework by 2010, in compliance to European Qualification Framework (EQF), which lays out the expected qualification of graduates as part of internationalization perspective. Between 2009 and 2013, 72 universities have been awarded DS label, and 32 universities ECTS label (Labels, 2013, pp. 51-51). As of 2015, 189 universities out of 194 have been granted Erasmus University Charter.

In the last decade, Turkish HEIs have also been active in participating to and forming international joint programs, which is considered to be hallmark of European cultural, linguistic and academic diversity (Sursock, 2015, p. 43). Beside European institutions, Turkish HEIs have American partners as well. But, a survey of joint program satisfaction reports major challenges in the area of language and culture (Helms, 2014, p. 37).

Turkey has also developed its own exchange program called Mevlana Exchange Programme as a CoHE initiative, started in 2011. CoHE has signed protocol with 125 universities from 34 countries for exchange of students and academic staff. An initial report estimated 622 outgoing and 309 incoming academic staff, 595 incoming and 402 outgoing students (Mevlana, 2011). The program covers the area outside of EHEA and provides students with an opportunity of one to two semester study abroad, and academic staff with one week to three months teaching experience abroad.

Latvia

Latvia has been part of Bologna Process since it started in 1999 and several key developments have been achieved since then. Bologna Process has been carried out

by Ministry of Education and Science. Law on Higher Institutions of Education has observed Bologna Process perspective since 2000 (VVC). In regard to internationalization, the Law mandates compliance of national qualification system to European Qualifications Framework. It is also significant that the Law makes compulsory for the HEIs to include five percent of academic staff from other European Union countries than Latvia (Section 3, Paragraph 7), which makes internationalization a priority for HEIs. Between 2009 and 2013, 13 universities have been awarded DS label, and 1 university ECTS label (Labels, 2013, pp. 51-51). ECEA recognizes 49 higher education institutions of Latvia in Erasmus Charter Holders List (EACEA, 2014) Latvian Parliament has adopted amendments to the Education Law on June 18, 2015, including an article about the Latvian Qualifications Framework that concerns all categories of higher education (vocational / professional and academic) and qualifications obtained outside the education system. The amendment observes compliance to EQF. In the pursuit of expanding internationality, Latvia has developed an exchange program with Canada in 2015 for youth between 18 and 35 who seek for further training on paid employment (Embassy, 2015).

The accounts reveal that both Latvia and Turkey have mainly focused on European perspective in the internationalization of HEIs. Bologna process has been the main reference for reconsideration and reassessment of learning outcomes of academic programs in both countries. Both countries therefore share the ideological substance of Bologna Process towards building European identity through education to cope with emerging global competition. European identity seems to have been so influential that Bologna Process has not been discussed in terms of autonomy of HEIs, supposedly a major concern for Bologna Process. The paradox of autonomous HEIs and the imposition of qualification system of graduates have remained undiscussed in both countries. It is not surprising in case of Turkey where autonomy of HEIs already low due to the central administration that holds the most part of authority. Among the 29 countries, Turkish HEIs rank 28th in organizational, 23th in financial, 21st in staffing, and 25th in academic autonomy (EUA, n.d.b). Latvia however has much higher autonomy ranking 15th in organizational, 4th in financial, 6th staffing, and 20th in academic autonomy (Latvia, n.d.a). In the framework of autonomy, Latvian case can only be explained with the power of ideology of European identity, which an apparent configuration of instrumentalism. The instrumentalist internationalization of HEIs has not been exclusive to EHEA. It is being exercised in many other parts of world, as seriously criticized by some scholars. In reference to internationalization of HEIs, Schapper and Mayson argues, "The erosion of academic freedoms, alienation from university decision-making processes, accompanied by large class sizes, student diversity and the administrative and pedagogical demands of new modes of curricula delivery, characterize the academic's everyday working environment" (2005, p. 181).

Academics and internationalization

Turkey

Even though not the main concern, mobility of academics has also been included in Bologna Process. In a report by EACEA, Turkey has been mentioned

among the countries without a national policy for academics mobility (Racké, 2013, p. 7). However, there has been an increase in the total number of incoming and outgoing academic staff between 2005 and 2013 (Çetinsaya, 2014, p. 161). In 2013, there has been 2.550 incoming and 3.886 outgoing academic staff in Erasmus Exchange Program. International academic staffs are mostly hosted by foundation universities, totalling 1% of the total number of academics in Turkey. The 2% quota for international academics in the legislation is still away from being fulfilled. Yet, Turkey has been included among the top sending countries in 2012-2013 academic calendar (Erasmus, 2014, p. 11).

Latvia

In Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science reports the number of international academics in Latvia as 138 (Ministrijas, 2015, p. 71). As Latvia has a quota of 5%, much higher than Turkey, the achievement of the target can be inspiring. It is however possible to have an idea about international academic staff with the data available on the webpage of University of Latvia, which has 822 academics in total, with 93 internationals (Key Documents and Statistics, 2015), which counts more than 10%. It is apparent that some universities hire international academic staff more, while some others do not. It is also worth nothing that National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014-2020 includes measures for academic mobility in the pursuit of projects suitable for commercialization in Latvia (2012, p. 30).

Students and internationalization

Turkey

Turkey has sent 71.196 students to other Erasmus countries and 27.761 students from them between 2004 and 2012 (Çetinsaya, 2014, p. 159). Yet, the percentage to the total number of students is still low, partly due to the new universities opened recently. In 2012-2013, Turkey has been among the top sending Erasmus countries in number, but with a low percentage, again, due to the new universities. The evaluation does not seem to be realistic, as the new universities cannot be candidate for Erasmus program instantly. But, in a six year prospect, the report prepared by National Agency in 2013 reveals that the number of outgoing students was behind the 2020 targets of Bologna Process with approximately 10.000 students per year (Ülgür, 2013). The Report indicates that the annual increase should be 22%. By 2020, 20% of graduates should have joined the student mobility through Erasmus. The report also points out that the main reason of the low percentage is lack of language skills among the students.

Latvia

Latvia on the other hand is among the top sending countries in relation to the share outbound students in total student population (Erasmus, 2014, p. 17). In an insightful survey-based research, Karina Oborune reveals the impact of Erasmus Program on Latvian youth (Oborune, 2012). However the main focus of the study is to discuss the meaning of the concept of European identity, she provides details about the profile of Latvian higher education students in regard to Erasmus Program.

A gender-related phenomenon has also been identified in Latvia, like many other European countries, as far as the number of outbound students is concerned. Female students interested in Erasmus program is 1.5 time higher than male students, implying that male Latvian students are underrepresented in Erasmus. Another imbalance that Latvia is experiencing is the low share of incoming students in comparison to outgoing students (Grabher, Wejwar, Unger & Terzieva, 2014).

Conclusion

In the perspective of Bologna process, both Latvia and Turkey are in a need for internationalization strategy developed and implemented by national governing bodies. It may even be argued that such a need in both countries emerged during the adaptation to the Bologna Process. Turkey has a clear ideology of instrumentalism, attempting to be prepared to the global economic processes. The ideology is shared by Latvia, with the additional motif of ageing population, which is common in many European countries. Latvia is now in the process of radical changes of education system. Much effort is being put on relating higher education with industrial activities. In this process, it is also expected that revisions would ease internationalization of higher education. Turkey on the other hand still lacks an attempt to make changes required for both Bologna Process and other possible options for internationalization. Even only the issue of language skills by itself may require substantial policy changes in education system.

EHEA's framework requires a top-down structure that governing bodies operate the process. As a complementary response to this flow a bottom-up approach from academics would help define problems and barriers. By the very nature of the topic, such studies are in fact inclined to policy making analysis. Policymakers may avoid such comparisons due to the apparent reason of politics. It is therefore on academics to advance the perspective in order to achieve better results on internationalization of higher education in an increasingly global world. Further research in the framework of this paper or alike is certainly needed to come to some conclusions.

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Sibel Burçer, PhD Student, University of Latvia, Latvia, Sibelburcer@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Philol. Ilze Kangro, University of Latvia, Latvia, ilze.kangro@lu.lv