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## BOLOGNA REFORMS ON THE FIELD: VIEWS FROM COORDINATORS AT TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

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### Abstract

Higher education has been witnessing sweeping transformations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Science and higher education became an indispensable part of economic rivalry with the advancement of a global knowledge economy. Accordingly, in many countries mission of higher education has been redefined and shifted from “social, cultural, national” domain to “economic and international” domain. In Europe, this shift has been very much stimulated by a unique regional integration project. In 1999, 29 European countries initiated ‘Bologna Process’ and committed themselves to reform their higher education systems for a common higher education area. Turkey participated in the process in 2001 and implemented significant reforms since then. Yet, structural reforms at national level haven’t been diffused into the institutional level, and there are many challenges regarding the adoption of the process in universities. This is partly due to the top-down implementation and poor participation of main stakeholders and practitioners. Yet, voices of both practitioners and stakeholders is crucial for sustainability and success of the process. This paper aims at reflecting views from universities and reveals the findings of a survey carried out in 2015 with Bologna coordinators of 57 Turkish universities. Main findings indicate that while Bologna reforms are perceived as necessary and useful for Turkish universities, there are significant problems in practice and it could be argued that there is a democracy deficit regarding the implementation process of Bologna reforms.

**Keywords:** Bologna Process, Higher Education, Universities, Turkish Higher Education, Internationalization.

### Introduction

Higher education sector has been witnessing sweeping transformations with the impact of globalization and knowledge economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rapid developments in information and communication technologies resulted in a global knowledge economy in which science and higher education became an indispensable part of economic rivalry. Higher education is viewed as an engine for the development of a knowledge-based economy and policies and programs increasingly shaped in accordance with wider geo-strategic political and economic interests (Robertson, 2008). Accordingly, in many countries the role and mission of higher education have been redefined and shifted from “social, cultural and national” domain to “economic and international” domain. Internationalization of higher education has also gone beyond academic activities and become a part of a broader agenda of global political economy.

Insertion of economic goals into higher education has meant a radical transformation of European universities which were long organized around Humboldtian principles of academic freedom, autonomy and national culture. In this economic and political environment, European countries initiated a unique regional integration project in higher education area to compete with the US and other rising countries in global rivalry. In 1999, representatives from 29 European countries signed the ‘Bologna Declaration’ and committed themselves to reform their higher education systems by 2010. The process has called for a common higher education area throughout Europe which is more compact, comparable, and compatible in terms of both education and research. The European Commission set an agenda for enhancing all kinds of mobility across Europe that went beyond the mobility programmes that had been in place since the late 1980s, and laid the groundwork for ‘fifth freedom’ - “the free movement of knowledge” (Robertson and Kedsierzki, 2016: 11). Today all members of the Council of Europe have signed the agreement (47 states), both EU and non- EU members, all create the European Higher Education Area. Promotion of the external dimension of the Bologna Process helps the EU to build its image as an international leading actor in the field of higher education.

Turkey, which is a candidate country for full membership in the EU, became a member of the process in 2001 and Turkish higher education has witnessed significant changes since then. In fact, the main driving force behind Turkish higher education policies has long been integration with the Western world. Bologna process, which Turkey joined in 2001, has brought a new impulse to this agenda (Yağcı, 2010: 588). Bologna process has been considered as a policy instrument for both reform initiatives and internationalization attempts by education policy makers in Turkey. Yet, structural reforms at national level

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have not been diffused into the institutional level, and there are many challenges regarding the adoption and implementation of the process in universities. This is partly due to the top-down implementation of the process which has lacked necessary participation of main stakeholders, faculty and students. On the other hand, there is little room for voices of practitioners who work at international offices and performs daily workload of the process. Yet, participation of both practitioners and stakeholders is crucial for sustainability and success of the process.

In spite of significant literature on Bologna Process in Turkey, there are few studies dealing directly with implementation of reforms at universities (Alkanat, 2010; Bircanvd., 2011; Dalgıç, 2008; Elmas, 2012; Nohutçu, 2006; Yağcı, 2010). Main objective of this paper is to contribute to literature in this manner and to reflect views of the practitioners who perform implementation of reforms in Turkish universities. It is assumed that such studies produce results not only for theoretical discussions but also for policy makers. In this context, this paper aims at reflecting views from Turkish universities regarding Bologna reforms and reveals the findings of a survey carried out with Bologna coordinators. Survey was carried out in 2015 with the participation of 57 Turkish universities and views of heads of Bologna Coordination Committees regarding the Bologna process were analyzed.

### **1. Bologna Process: A Brief Overview**

The Bologna Process is a commitment between governments of countries in Europe to restructure their higher education systems and the Lisbon Strategy is part of the Union's wider economic platform including the higher education sector (Keeling, 2006). The lead up to the 'Bologna Process' began in 1998, when ministers of higher education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom signed the 'Sorbonne Declaration' which called for the harmonisation of higher education qualification systems in Europe. The Bologna process was launched the following year when representatives from 29 EU countries signed the 'Bologna Declaration' and committed themselves to reform their higher education systems by 2010 (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Bologna Declaration has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents. Reform was needed to match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably the United States and Asia. Thus, the logic behind the Bologna process can be seen as a part of a wider economic, social and technological transformations that the world has witnessed over the last years. In other words, Bologna reforms are not simply educational ones, there is a significant economic impetus behind them. Much of this restructuring in higher education has been based on the principles of neo liberalism and new institutional economics (Vural Yılmaz, 2014: 91-92) .

Insertion of economic goals into higher education has meant a radical transformation of European universities which were organized around Humboldtian principles of higher education. In Humboldtian understanding of the university, higher education was regarded as a "public good" whose social mission was to reproduce national culture, decrease social inequalities, and serve the public interest in the form of civic education. Universities were perceived as a places of advanced learning and critical thinking. Yet, within new knowledge economy paradigm, universities are seen as an integral part of global economic rivalry. In a global neo-liberal environment, universities are seen as key drivers in the knowledge economy and, as a consequence, higher education institutions have been encouraged to develop links with industry and business in a series of new venture partnerships (Kaya, 2015: 115).

To attain the primary ends of the Bologna process the Bologna Declaration gives high priority to 'the achievement of greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education' (Bologna Declaration, 1999). Over the last years, 47 countries, more than 4 000 higher education institutions and numerous stakeholder organisations have continued to adapt their higher education systems, making them more compatible, modernising degree structures and strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms. It is possible to say that The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has evolved towards a more common and much more understandable structure of degrees. Yet, as stated in 2015 Bologna Implementation report, there is much to be done. In general words, the foundations of the European Higher Education Area are not yet fully stable (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015: 1-2).

Regarding degree structures and national qualifications frameworks there is substantial development in some countries yet, in some countries there is no progress. A majority of countries still face challenges in including non-formal qualifications within national higher education frameworks. Two thirds of countries have failed to fulfil all the requirements of the Diploma Supplement, and the least achieved requirement is its automatic issuing. In the countries that struggle with a shift to student-centred learning, the most critical problems are a lack of recognition of the value of student evaluation of teaching, independent learning and the use of learning outcomes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015: 17-19).

Findings indicate that the trend for higher education institutions to develop their own strategies for quality enhancement is spreading and increasing. Equally the public accountability and transparency requirements in quality assurance systems are evolving. But, the main issue is no longer whether or not a quality assurance system has been established, but rather whether the system is producing effective results. In this respect, there is still progress to be made, particularly regarding student participation in quality assurance. The concept of lifelong learning is rarely well defined in operational terms in EHEA countries, and where definitions exist, they are in many cases rather general and may vary across countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015: 17-19).

Data also show that higher education graduates have been hit hard by the economic crisis in terms of their employment prospects. Unemployment ratios have grown proportionally more for them than for their peers with lower levels of education. Student mobility rates show slight increases since the 2012 Implementation Report, but still only a minority of students benefit from such experience and mobility for under-represented groups would need greater attention. There is considerable evidence of significant national action to strengthen mobility, but monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of these measures is lacking in most countries. For both student and staff mobility, it will be essential to focus not only on numbers, but also on the quality of mobility. (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015: 19-23).

Whether the Bologna process has accomplished its mission is a question with many answers, and they are as different as can be, ranging from 'highly successful' to 'failed', depending on who gives the answer. The most positive answers come from inside the Bologna system and from the ministers, the most critical from those academics, researchers and students (Rudder, 2010: 4). As Rudder (2010: 10) states "As far as the introduction of formalised European structures and procedures in higher education are concerned, the Bologna process can be described as a success story. Without underestimating the importance of common formalized structures and procedures we should nonetheless ask what they have contributed in real terms to the attainment of the major goals of the Bologna process - mobility and employability of students and academic staff and the attractiveness of European higher education". The process seems to be suffering from an overload of additional and complementary activities which shadows the initial goals. In other words it seems that the means and ends of the process are blurred. On the other hand, the higher education community is deeply divided over the philosophy of 'Bologna'. It seems that at the 'front lines', where academic teaching and research actually take place, the Bologna reforms are widely perceived as additional top-down measures and regulations which infringe academic freedom (Rudder, 2010: 9). There are many voices calling for "reform of the Bologna Reforms" (VuralYılmaz, 2014: 103).

## **2. Bologna Reforms in Turkish Higher Education**

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

The higher education system in Turkey started to develop in the 1930s in line with the Humboldtian model and continued with Anglo-Saxon influences in the 1960s. Hence, integration in the Western world has been a determining driver of higher education policies (Yağcı, 2010: 588). The candidacy for EU membership can be seen as a continuation of the same integration idea. The relations between Turkey and EU started with Turkey's application associate membership in the European Economic Community in 1959. Following the approval of the application by EEC, an Association Agreement known as the Ankara Agreement was signed on September 12, 1963. The recognition of Turkey as a candidate country for accession at the Helsinki European Council of December 1999, opened a new era in Turkey-EU relations. As the candidate country of the EU Turkey has gained the right to full participation in the EU's programs and officially joined the Bologna process in 2001. The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the Interuniversity Council (UAK) are involved in the process as stakeholders. The Turkish National Agency was established in 2002. One year after establishing the Turkish National Agency, Erasmus-European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been launched as a pilot Project in 2003. In 2005, YÖDEK as an independent organization for quality assurance was established and universities were called for establishing their quality mechanisms (YÖK, 2012).

It could be said that the CoHE makes use of the Bologna Process as a means of restructuring the HES in Turkey. 2007 strategy report of CoHE (YÖK, 2007) which covers the Bologna Process extensively, emphasizes the concept of a "knowledge society" and aims to prepare Turkey for changes taking place in the global arena. The report states that Turkey "should fulfill the demands of the knowledge society by increasing its competitiveness in the world and also by becoming an effective actor in the areas of European

education and research.” In line with this policy, national restructuring policy has been developed along the lines of Bologna Qualifications Frameworks, Quality Assurance, the European Credit Transfer System, Diploma Supplement, Mobility, Lifelong Learning Programmes, Joint Degrees and the Social Dimension (YÖK 2010, 24). In 2008, the CoHE created a *Bologna Coordination Commission* (BEK) in each university. BEKs are responsible for the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms at the institutional level. Members are appointed by the rector and are selected from staff working in international relations, quality assurance, mobility and student affairs (YÖK, 2012).

In 2011, an addendum was made to Article 44 of the Law on Higher Education (Law No. 2547) to prompt universities to make the required changes in their administrative and academic structures regarding the introduction of ECTS, learning outcomes, course descriptions, student workloads and diploma supplements. (Kaya, 2015: 117). Thus, Turkish universities have been implementing Bologna reforms as a legal requirement. In terms of implementation of Bologna reforms, Turkish higher education system performs well in some areas, while there is no progress in other action lines. Bologna scorecards of Turkey (From Bergen-2005 to Buchares-2012) implies that at the initial stage of the process Turkish Higher education was more compatible with the reforms. Yet, as additional action lines like lifelong learning came into picture, performance of Turkish universities went worse (Table 1).

**Table 1. Bologna Scorecards of Turkey (2005-2012)**

	Bergen 2005	London 2007	Leuven 2009	Bucharest 2012
<b>Degree system</b>	Excellent (4.67)	Very good (4.33)	Very good (4.33)	Very good (4.66)
Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle	Excellent (5)	Excellent (5)	Excellent (5)	Excellent (5)
Access to next cycle	Very good (4)	Excellent (5)	Excellent (5)	Excellent (5)
Implementation of NQF	-	Good (3)	Good (3)	Very good (4)
<b>Quality assurance</b>	Some prog (2)	Very good (4)	Very good (4)	Someprog (1.66)
National implementation of ESQ for QA in the EHEA	Some prog (2)	Excellent (5)	-	-
Stage of development of external quality assurance system	Some prog (2)	Very good (4)	Good (3)	Good(3)
Level of student participation	Some prog (2)	Very good (4)	Excellent (5)	Poor (1)
Level of international participation	Some prog. (2)	Good (3)	Very good (4)	Poor (1)
<b>Recognition of degrees and study periods</b>	Very good (3.67)	Very good (3.67)	Very good (3.67)	Good (3)
Diploma supplement	Very good (3.6)	Very good (3.6)	Very good (3.6)	Good (3)
Lisbon convention	Good (3)	Very good (4)	Excellent (5)	-
Ects	Very good (3.6)	Excellent (5)	Good (3)	Good (3)
<b>Life long learning</b>	-	Good (3)	Poor (1)	Poor (1)
Recognition of prior learning	-	Good (3)	Poor (1)	Poor (1)
<b>5. Joint degrees</b>		Excellent (5)	-	-
Establishment and recognition of joint degrees	-	Excellent (5)	-	-
<b>Avarage in total</b>	Good (3.30)	Very Good(4.16)	Good (3.80)	Good (2.8)

Source: Drawn by the author by using Bologna scorecards

An investigation into Turkish universities’ performance regarding each action line reveals the following general results: As for the degree structure, which call for the establishment of a system based on two main cycles of undergraduate and graduate studies, Turkey did not have to undergo significant structural changes because it had already adopted the cyclical structure of the US model. The decline in Bologna performance is resulted from quality assurance and lifelong learning to a great extent. In particular lack of external quality assurance mechanisms and inadequate student participation lead to this performance downgrade. Recognition of prior non-formal studies is another problematic area regarding Turkish higher education. As for the joint degrees, there are no legal barriers, yet the quantity and quality of joint programs are questionable. Thus, in general terms it could be said that Turkish higher education has no important problems in terms of structural changes needed by the Bologna reforms since it has already been based on the US system. Yet, the substance of the regulations and whether they serve to develop the quality of higher education are questionable.

On the other hand, there are academic and societal tensions regarding the question of whether the Process should be perceived as an expression of internationalization, Americanization, or Europeanization. Bologna Process has been concerned as a tool for commercialization of university education (Kaya, 2015: 118). The launch of the process is another problem, since it started from above without participation of the universities. CoHE is the decisive body of the Bologna Process in Turkey. Since the beginning of the reform

process, most changes have been structural and are carried out by the central bodies. A possible impact can be a lack of understanding of the substance of the reforms. A great deal of academicians perceive Bologna process as a top-down bureaucratic regulations which are no more than an additional workload. Thus, implementation of the process lacks participation and enthusiasm of the most important actors, universities. For this reason this paper focuses on the views from the field and investigates opinions of practitioners of the process.

### 3. Objective of the Study

Since the inclusion of Turkey into the Bologna Process in the year 2001, considerable number of reforms have been realized in direct connection with the process through policy transfer. Yet, it is hard to say that structural reforms at national level have been welcomed and diffused into the inner structures of universities. There are still many challenges and rejections regarding the implementation of the process in universities. Indeed, universities have had little say about the process and its implementation lacks democratic participation. This leads a gap between the decision makers and real practitioners who apply the process and shoulder the burden. This research was carried out from this perspective and aimed at reflecting Turkish universities' situation regarding Bologna process. Main goals of the study are to identify and analyze practitioners' perceptions, beliefs and expectations regarding the implementation of the Bologna principles in Turkey.

### 4. Methodology

A Likert scale questionnaire was designed for Bologna coordinators/ Heads of Bologna Coordination Committees and explored their understanding, evaluations and expectations regarding the reforms. Survey questions were formed in the light of literature, Bologna reports and the issues raised in national/ international meetings that the researcher participated in. In addition, a preview was realized with the participation of Suleyman Demirel University international office managers and the survey was finalized in accordance with their suggestions. To ensure the quality of the research, 100 % sampling was taken in questionnaire, as the link to the questionnaire was sent to all Bologna coordinators of Turkish universities. Questionnaires were administered using the Survey Monkey web-based software package. An information e-mail was sent to all Bologna coordinators in Turkish universities which contained information about researcher, the goal and content of the survey. After a one -week monitoring a second reminder e-mail was sent to coordinators. At the end of two-months duration 57 Bologna coordinators were completed the survey.

### 5. Findings

The survey questioner is composed of two main sections which explore opinions and evaluations of Bologna coordinators on Bologna process in general and its implementation at Turkish higher education system. The findings of the survey are presented in below sections.

#### 5.1. Opinions of Bologna Coordinators on Bologna Process in General

This part of the survey was designed to explore opinions of Bologna coordinators regarding Bologna process in general. To this end, some propositions were presented to respondents and they were asked to depict their opinion on a Likert scale with 5 options from "totally agree" to "totally disagree". Main findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Opinions on Bologna Process

	Strongly agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Goals of the Bologna process are realistic and obtainable.	%4,55	%31,82	<b>%43,18</b>	%20,45	%0
Bologna process makes European universities competitive against the US universities.	%0	%18,18	%36,36	<b>%43,18</b>	%2,27
Bologna process is successful at creating an identity of a common European higher education community.	%0	%27,27	<b>%45,45</b>	%27,27	%0
Bologna process increases international cooperation.	%13,64	<b>%43,18</b>	%40,91	%2,27	%0
Bologna process increases international competition.	%4,55	%29,55	<b>%52,27</b>	%13,64	%0
Bologna reforms ignore the specific conditions of each higher education system peculiar to that country.	%2,27	<b>%43,18</b>	%34,09	%18,18	%2,27
Bologna reforms reduce the degree of autonomy and flexibility of universities due to standardization.	%2,27	<b>%36,36</b>	%29,55	%27,27	%4,55
Bologna process brings about commercialization of higher	%4,55	%22,73	<b>%38,64</b>	%29,55	%4,55

education.					
Bologna reforms brings about a transformation from traditional university to entrepreneur university.	%0	<b>%52,27</b>	%31,82	%15,91	%0
Bologna process establish a hierararchical structure between the universities of centre and periphery.	%6,82	<b>%43,18</b>	%27,27	%20,45	%2,27
Bologna process promotes mobility among universities on an equal basis.	%5,56	%27,78	<b>%33,33</b>	<b>%33,33</b>	%0
Bologna process promotes mobility in advance of students and scholars who are stronger in financial terms.	%11,11	<b>%33,33</b>	%11,11	<b>%33,33</b>	%11,11
Mobility of scholars and students should be regarded as a cultural exchange rather than an academic activity.	%11,90	<b>%40,48</b>	%30,95	%14,29	%2,38
Student participation in Bologna process is not yet adequate.	%18,18	<b>%61,36</b>	%18,18	%2,27	%0
Social dimension of Bologna process is not adequately implemented.	%30,23	<b>%39,53</b>	%30,23	%0	%0
Bologna reforms are implemented in formal structures, yet they do not result in qualitative development.	%9,09	%27,27	<b>%52,27</b>	%11,36	%0 0
Bologna process has been transformed into an excessive bureaucratic process where the distinction between means and ends has been blurred.	%13,64	<b>%63,64</b>	%18,18	%2,27	%2,27

First question of the survey was asked to find out whether Bologna coordinators find the goals of the process as attainable. 80% of coordinators at least partially agree that the goals are realistic and obtainable. Thus it seems that Bologna coordinators have a positive approach towards the main tenets of the reform. Yet, coordinators do not depict the same positive picture when the competition with the US is regarded. 45 % of participants do not think that European universities could compete with the US higher education. Thus, while Bologna coordinators believe that goals of the process are attainable, they are cautious about the overall aim of making European higher education more competitive. Nearly all participants agree that the process increases international cooperation and they underline the cooperative nature of process rather than competitive one. Yet, when it comes to a common European identity, respondents only partially agree that the process creates such an environment. Thus, from the viewpoint of Bologna coordinators, the process enhances international cooperation, but it has not progressed enough to think about a common European higher education identity.

As for the standardization impact of Bologna process, 70% of coordinators at least partially agree that autonomy and flexibility of universities decrease. On the other hand, nearly 80% of participants agree that Bologna process ignore the peculiarity of higher education systems to some extent. One third of the participants do not perceive the process as leading to commercialization of higher education. Yet, two thirds of the respondents at least partially agree that the process brings about some commercialization in higher education service. Again, 84% of coordinators agree that the process signals a transformation from traditional university to the entrepreneur university. Thus, coordinators generally accepts that the process leads to changes in the meaning and functions of Humboldtian understanding of university towards American university system and some of them underlines commercial dimension of this transformation.

Next five questions touch upon the equality issues. The proposition that Bologna process creates a hierarchical order is supported by 50% of the coordinators and 27% of respondents partially agree with that. Yet, when it comes to mobility, coordinators have a more positive approach. Nearly two third of the participants agree that universities participate in mobility programmes on an equal basis. 44% of the participants disagree with the proposition that mobility favours students and scholars with more financial resources. Thus, it might be said that mobility dimension of Bologna process is found more successful possibly due to the financial support provided through Erasmus programme.

The most agreed propositions about the Bologna process are on it's formal and bureaucratic dimension. Nearly all participants agree that the process is too bureaucratic and formal implementation undermines the quality concerns. Similarly, coordinators emphasize the inadequate implementation of social dimension and lack of student participation. Thus, while coordinators perceive the process as a positive contribution for higher education, they raise some concerns about the implementation and quality dimension of reforms.

## **5.2. Opinions of Bologna Coordinators on Implementation of Bologna Reforms in Turkish Universities**

This section of the survey focused on the implementation of Bologna reforms in Turkish universities. Accordingly, coordinators were first asked to evaluate their performance regarding main Bologna action lines. In the following section, questions were organized to explore their opinions on the implementation of

reforms. The last few questions focused on barriers to mobility in Turkish universities. Results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Opinions on Bologna Performance of Universities**

	Very weak	Weak	Medium	Good	Very good
1. ECTS/DS	%0	%2,27	%31,82	<b>%47,73</b>	%18,18
2. Joint degrees	%	%31,82	<b>%38,64</b>	%18,18	%11,36
3. Mobility	%2,27	%13,64	%31,82	<b>%45,45</b>	%6,82
4. Quality Assurance	%0	%27,27	<b>%43,18</b>	%25	%4,55
5. Student Participation and social dimension	%0	%23,26	<b>%39,53</b>	%32,56	%4,65
6. Doctoral studies	%3,85	<b>%42,31</b>	%15,38	%38,46	%0
7. Lifelong learning	%2,33	<b>%44,19</b>	%23,26	%25,58	%4,65

Findings imply that Turkish universities perform best at ECTS, DS and mobility. Lifelong learning and doctoral studies seem to be the least successful action lines. Bologna coordinators perceive their performance modest in terms of joint degrees, quality assurance and social dimension. Indeed these findings are in parallel with overall performance of Turkish higher education system as appear at the Bologna scorecards of Turkey.

On the other hand, when findings are grouped under state and private universities some differences drive attention. In Table 4, action lines were put in order from best to worse in line with the state and private universities. The common point between two groups of universities is that they perceive themselves best at ECTS and DS. Indeed, ECTS/DS were among the first implementation areas in Turkish higher education which started in 2003 and have become main action lines of success. Besides, it seems that universities are more ready and eager to develop mobility schemes and it's tools because the positive outcomes of mobility are more visible for both students and staff. As for quality assurance and social dimension private universities perceive themselves better than state universities. A possible reason behind this result may be the smaller size of private universities with more financial resources. Particularly most of newly established universities in Anatolian cities struggle with infrastructure problems, lack of finance and inadequate human resources along with increasing student supply each year. This situation leads to quality concerns and difficulty in enhancing social services. On the other hand, state universities perform better in doctoral studies and lifelong learning possibly due to their experience and capacity (Table 4).

**Table 4. Bologna Performance of State and Private Universities Compared**

Bologna Action Lines	State Universities	Private Universities
	ECTS/DS	ECTS/DS
	Doctoral studies	Mobility
	Mobility	Social dimension
	Lifelong learning	Quality assurance
	Social dimension	Joint degrees
	Joint degrees	Lifelong learning
	Quality assurance	Doctoral studies

Following questions were designed explore Bologna experience of Turkish universities and to this end Bologna coordinators were asked to share their opinions regarding implementation process of Bologna reforms in their universities. Answers are set in Table 5.

**Table 5. Implementation of Bologna Reforms in Turkish Universities**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Bologna Process has positive impact on Turkish higher education and my university.	%18,1	%29,5	<b>%52,2</b>	%0	%0
Bologna process has been implemented in a planned manner according to a national program.	%6,8	<b>%61,3</b>	%11,3	%15,9	%4,5
Bologna reforms have been implemented in an interactive way with the feedback from universities.	%4,5	%27,2	<b>%43,1</b>	%25	%0
Bologna reforms have been implemented too rapidly without necessary time for institutional adaptation.	%13,6	<b>%38,6</b>	%36,3	%9,1	%2,3
Turkish universities have the autonomy and flexibility to perform Bologna reforms in accordance with their needs.	%4,5	%18,2	%15,9	<b>%52,2</b>	%9,1
Bologna reforms should be implemented by CoHE from above as central authority.	%4,5	%22,7	%15,9	<b>%52,2</b>	%4,5



Implementation of Bologna reforms should be left to each university without intervention from above.	%13,6	<b>%38,6</b>	%20,4	%25,0	%2,2
Existing legal regulations in Turkey contradict with the principles of Bologna process.	%15,9	<b>%47,7</b>	%15,9	%15,9	%4,5
Outcomes of Bologna process help to strengthen our interaction with other European universities.	%22,2	%27,7	<b>%38,8</b>	%5,5	%5,5
My university has adequate financial resources to implement Bologna reforms.	%11,3	%27,2	%9,1	<b>%34,1</b>	%18,1
Bologna process has been perceived as an unnecessary workload in my university.	%11,6	<b>%51,1</b>	%32,5	%4,6	%0
There should be an awarding system regarding scholars that work in implementation of Bologna reforms.	<b>%47,7</b>	%29,5	%18,1	%4,5	%0
In my university, there is high degree of awareness and participation among scholars regarding Bologna process.	%6,8	%11,3	<b>%40,9</b>	%36,3	%4,5
In my university, there is high degree of awareness and participation among students regarding Bologna process.	%2,2	%11,3	%20,5	<b>%59,1</b>	%6,8
In my university scholars have negative reaction and resistance against Bologna reforms.	%13,6	%34,1	<b>%43,2</b>	%9,1	%0
In my university students have negative reaction and resistance against Bologna reforms.	%6,8	%6,8	<b>%50</b>	%25	%11,4
ECTS has been implemented properly in my university.	%6,8	%29,5	<b>%45,5</b>	%15,9	%2,2
Diploma Supplement is issued for all students in my university.	%32,5	<b>%44,2</b>	%11,6	%11,6	%0

Slightly more than half of Bologna coordinators (%52) perceive Bologna process as partially positive for their universities. Remaining respondents perceive the process as positive. Besides, it should be noted that there is no coordinator perceiving the process as negative. Thus, Bologna coordinators have a positive approach towards Bologna process in principle and they are not against the philosophy of Bologna in general terms. Yet, this positive situation does not apply to the implementation of the reforms. More than half of the respondents agree that their universities lack adequate resources and infrastructure to implement Bologna reforms. Only 38% of coordinators evaluate their resources as adequate for implementation.

Most of the coordinators (68%) think that Bologna process has been implemented in a planned manner according to a national program. Yet, they do not have a positive opinion on the participation of universities. Only 32% of the coordinators think that Bologna reforms have been implemented in an interactive way with the feedback from universities. Most of the coordinators (65%) think that constitutional and legal regulations regarding higher education in Turkey do not provide a favorable framework for Bologna process. Again, 60% of coordinators argue that Turkish universities have no adequate autonomy and flexibility to implement Bologna reforms in their terms. In parallel, nearly 73% of coordinators support the idea that Implementation of Bologna reforms should be left to each university without intervention from above.

63% of the respondents remark that Bologna process has been perceived as an unnecessary workload in their universities. The rating of respondents who disagree with this proposition is only %5. Similarly, only 18% of coordinators find the awareness and participation of scholars sufficient. As for student participation there is a similar picture. Again, 91 % of coordinators at least partially agree that scholars have negative reaction and resistance against Bologna reforms. 74% of coordinators at least partially agree that students have negative reaction and resistance against Bologna reforms. This means that Bologna coordinators think that while awareness and participation of university members is low, there is also a resistance against the implementation process. 36% of coordinators think that ECTS is implemented properly in their universities. As for the Diploma Supplement coordinators depict a more positive picture with the ratio of 77% issuing Diploma Supplement to their students automatically.

As explained before, the most important pillar of Bologna process in Turkey is mobility. Thus, following questions were designed to measure the importance of main barriers to mobility (Table 6).

**Table 6. Barriers to Mobility**

Barriers to mobility	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Lack of information	%23,08	%30,77	<b>%38,46</b>	%7,69
Financial problems	%7,69	%15,38	<b>%42,31</b>	%34,62
Problems regarding foreign language	%7,69	%15,38	%15,38	<b>%61,54</b>
Lack of confidence	%3,85	%19,23	<b>%57,69</b>	%19,23
Recognition problems	%11,54	<b>%42,31</b>	%38,46	%7,69
Problems in receiving country (visa, residence etc.)	%11,54	%19,23	<b>%34,62</b>	<b>%34,62</b>
Inadequate promotion regarding Turkish universities	%3,85	%15,38	<b>%57,69</b>	%23,08
Inadequate lectures offered in foreign languages	%3,85	%7,69	<b>%57,69</b>	%30,77
Inadequate social services	%7,69	%50	<b>%42,31</b>	%0

Evaluation of Bologna coordinators reveal that in terms of outgoing students, the most important problems are foreign language competency, financial problems and lack of confidence. Recognition



problems seem to be less apparent which confirms the positive results regarding ECTS and DS. In terms of incoming students, the most important problem seems to be the lack of lectures offered in foreign languages. Thus, Bologna coordinators perceive foreign language as the most important barrier to both inward and outbound mobility. Findings could be summarized as follows:

## **6. Discussion**

Overall findings of the survey implies that Bologna reforms are regarded as a favorable process for Turkish higher education by Bologna coordinators who are responsible for the implementation at universities. Bologna coordinators have a positive approach towards Bologna process in principle and they are not against the philosophy of Bologna in general terms. It can be argued that Turkey's education policy has been Europeanized to a large extent, with the misfits between the two levels of policy being brought to a minimum. There is an extensive policy transfer in higher education within the context of Bologna process. Policy transfer has been accelerated through the use of tools like performance measurement, benchmarking and best practices. Turkish universities have been actively engaged in the Bologna Process and are very supportive of the Erasmus exchange program.

Bologna process has been regarded as an opportunity for reforming Turkish higher education in line with the international trends, determining the standards, establishing quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms. The process has been welcomed as a platform that Turkey takes place together with its European counterparts. According to survey findings, Bologna coordinators generally believe that the process increase cooperation among higher education institutions throughout Europe, yet they are more pessimistic about the capacity to compete with the US universities. Similarly, coordinators think that it is early to talk about a common European identity.

On the other hand, the positive attitudes of Bologna coordinators towards the process have not been shared by the members of Turkish universities with the same enthusiasim. Partly due to the instability of accession process to the EU, rising Euro skepticism in Turkey has also changed the process of Europeanization in universities. Findings imply that there have been important developments recorded in terms of Bologna reforms in Turkish universities, yet in some reform areas progress remained limited due to both structural and institutional barriers. This situation is prone to lead problems regarding the institutionalization and sustainability of the process. The most significant factor decreasing the success of reforms is the top-down, bureaucratic nature of implementation and lack of democratic participation. Bologna process was started by national government as similar to Europe. Thus, the process has been perceived as a more political one in which universities had no say at its initiation.

Although it is stated that the process is based on volunteer participation and there is no legal reinforcement, this is not the case in practice. Implementation of reforms have been directed by CoHE as a central governing body through various regulations and directives which are obligatory for universities. This centralized way of implementation lacks the democratic participation and cooperation of universities. Implementation of Bologna reforms is perceived as a top-down, bureaucratic work. Thus, Bologna Process seems to be far from being institutionalized in Turkey, as it is still being implemented by volunteering individuals who have internalized it. The Bologna offices of each university are frequently run by individuals very supportive of the process, although their efforts have not been accompanied by an institutionalization of the process.

Indeed, higher education is one of the areas that Turkey has made much progress in terms of harmonization with the EU. Since Turkish higher education system has adapted some traits of Anglo Saxon university model since 1980, in some areas such as degree system and credits, Turkey has a more convenient infrastructure than many European countries. Thus, Turkish universities have more easily adopted three cycle degree system, ECTS and DS regulations in formal implementation. Yet, when it comes to the substance of these implementations there are some question marks. Particularly, assesment of course credits on the basis of student workload is problematic and it is indefinite how much it is made in accordance with the goals of the process. Similarly, though many universities began to issue diploma supplement, its impact on the mobility and employability of the graduates is unknown.

Another problem in the implementation process is that over time tools have gained more importance than the actual goals of the reforms. Nearly all participants agree that the process is too bureaucratic and formal implementation undermines the quality concerns. 63% of the respondents remark that Bologna process has been perceived as an unnecessary workload in their universities. The heavy workload of Bologna regulations has been left to young scholars and assistants who have more responsibility but less authority. Thus, in practice implementation of reforms proceed slowly and without substance.

On the other hand, the most important weakness of Turkish higher education is quality assurance. Particularly external quality assurance mechanisms and student participation need to be improved. Both Bologna scorecards of Turkey and the survey findings imply that strategies and implementations on social

dimension and student participation remained insufficient. Indeed, insufficient implementation of social dimension throughout Europe has been criticized by students and scholars and Turkey is not exception in this regard.

The social dimension aims to widen overall access and increase participation and completion of underrepresented groups in higher education, according to the diversity of the national populations. In its turn, widening access to quality higher education is viewed as a precondition for societal progress and economic development. The social dimension is an important component of the process, which makes it different from an Americanization project in a way and underlies the European tradition of university that has perceived higher education as a public service with social responsibility. Thus, there is a need for strengthening approaches that put emphasize on the social dimension of the process.

The issue of autonomy is another important problem regarding both Bologna process and Turkish higher education. As for the standardization impact of Bologna process, 70% of coordinators at least partially agree that autonomy and flexibility of universities decrease. On the other hand, nearly 80% of participants agree that Bologna process ignore the peculiarity of higher education systems to some extent. Moreover, Turkish universities suffer from lack of autonomy and differantion due to the structure of the system. Bologna coordinators have reflected that Turkish universities should be more autonomous in order to better implement Bologna reforms in substance. Existing higher education system in Turkey is based on a central bureaucratic structure that defines and directs universities in the same format. Yet, each university has its own history, traditions, values and characteristics and thus should choose strategies accordingly. Similarly, universities should be included in decision making mechanisms both in general and in terms of Bologna reforms. There is a need for a democratic platform in which Bologna process will be discussed with a wider participation in terms of its impact on Turkish higher education and on the universities.

Main objective of this study is to contribute to this discussion by revealing opinions from the field and to shed a light for not only academic studies but also policy makers at international, national and institutional level. It's one of few studies focusing on Bologna coordinators at universities. On the other hand, the most significant limitation of the study is that number of Bologna coordinators who completed the survey remained limited due to their workload. It's expected that this paper will provide a useful ground for more comprehensive studies that will explore various dimensions of Bologna process from the viewpoint of practitioners.

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