**The Bologna Process, Identity and Power**

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**Bologna Process and the EU**

The Bologna Declaration which initiated the Bologna Process was signed in 1999 by 21 states, both EU members and non-EU states. 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. The initial aims of the Bologna Process were: the promotions of mobility and employability of citizens and international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

According to the Bologna Declaration, these aims would be achieved by the harmonization of higher education systems. Practically speaking, it meant that the Bologna member states were to adapt easily readable and comparable degrees (Diploma Supplement, ECTS), a 2 (later 3) cycles structure and European cooperation in quality assurance. These actions were adapted to promote student mobility and student employability.

Initially, the European Union was banned from signing the Bologna Process and to take part in it (although all its member states were signatory states). Despite the initial objection of the signatory states, shortly after its launch, the Bologna Process was quickly taken under the auspices of the European Union, which understood its potential to assist it in its aspirations at several levels (which will be elaborated later on).

Today, the European Union controls the Bologna Process 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. Although the Bologna Process is managed by European bodies, and applied in European countries, it aspires to influence more than the European higher education systems only. The Bologna process includes also the global strategy (once called the

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External Dimension of the Bologna Process). The intention of the external dimension/global strategy was to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA and increase cooperation with other parts of the world.

Going back to the EU’s involvement in the process: practically speaking, the EU took over the BFUG which allows it to navigate the whole process. It also promotes the external dimension of the Bologna Process and the dissemination of the Bologna Process outside Europe, through programs like Tempus and Erasmus Mundus, both programs offering EU funding for projects which promote higher education reform and mobility.

In this paper, I argue that the EU's decision to take control of the Bologna Process was due to its strategic motivations at both the internal and external level: First, internally, the Bologna Process helps the EU to promote the mobility of people inside its borders. As such, it supports the creation of a European identity among its citizens, through education. Second, externally: the Bologna Process may answer the EU's aspiration "to become the 'world’s most competitive knowledge economy" (as mentioned in Bergen communiqué).

I suggest that the EU taking over the External Dimension of the Bologna Process, relates not only to the creation of a European identity at the internal level, but also to the EU's foreign policy and its ambition to become a player in international arena. These processes can be understood through the Normative Power Theory and the Othering Theory.

**The Bologna Process and Normative Power**

The Normative Power theory relates to the non-military power theories (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”.

I suggest that through the dissemination of the Bologna Process outside European borders, the EU promotes and builds one of the elements of its normative power: the external image of the EU in the field of higher education, as written in the Bergen communiqué: "to become the 'world’s most competitive knowledge economy".

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economy". Moreover, the 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. The initial data reveals that exposure to the Bologna Process outside Europe affects not only the perception of the European higher education system, but also affects the perception of the EU as an international player in the international arena.

Although the Bologna Process signatory countries do not parallel with the EU member states, it is conceive as an EU Process (internally and externally), therefore the assumptions regarding the promotion of EU identity are valid in the case of the Bologna Process.

**Bologna Process and the Othering theory**

The Othering theory takes the normative power and relates it to the internal image of a body and its citizens: It arises from the field of psychology⁴, and is defined as: how an object defines itself in relation to the other and to the other’s perceptions about it. The diagram (bellow) can help understanding this process, also known as "reflective identity"⁵.

Othering Theory

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⁵ Chaban and Holland already used the Othering theory in the field of the International Relations in the case of the EU's foreign relations: Chaban, N. and Holland, M. (2008), The European Union and the Asia-Pacific, London and New York: Routledge.
The Othering Process can be understood as how the actor actively adopts a strategy, which shapes its external perception in the eyes of the 'other'. This external perception creates a certain reaction from the 'other' side, which emphasizes the expectations of the other from the actor, and strengthens the perception of the actor. These perceptions and expectations are also reflected in the actor's internal identity, which, in turn, affects the adopted strategy.

In the case of the Bologna Process I suggest that the promotion of its external dimension helps not only to build an external image of the EU as an international leading actor in the field of higher education, but also reflects back to the internal image of the EU and the identity of its citizens. As Strath defined: “Europe does not exist without non-European and can only be realized in the mirror of others”\(^6\)

**Conclusions:**

Therefore I argue that the EU actively disseminates and promotes the Bologna Process outside Europe's borders to:

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- Shape and strengthen its internal identity and its citizens identity
- Built and shape its external identity as an international actor, which in turn, through the Othering theory, also shapes the European internal identity.

Two points raised in this paper should be emphasized: the use that the EU does in untraditional unorthodox instruments in its foreign policy, and the connection between the EU’s foreign policy and its internal identity. The case of the Bologna Process demonstrates how the EU implements a new path of strengthening its power through the higher education system.

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