The Balkan Universities Association as a Scientific Network in The Balkan Region[1*]

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Abstract
The subject of regionalism and policy harmonization in higher education at regional level attracts the interests of researchers especially after the adaptation of Bologna process in Europe in 1999. The main objective of our presentation is to evaluate the role of Balkan Universities Association (BUA) in determining its leading vision for the future through the universities in the Balkan region on the base of common universal values. As a regional scientific network in the area of language, culture, art, history, economy, education and sports, BUA is carrying out significant collaborative scientific works.
By exploring the historical background, the membership, the various activities and projects put into practice or to be achieved in the forthcoming years by the BUA, we shall try to determine in general terms the importance of cooperation between universities as a kind of soft power in the Balkans. We will also try to find out their valuable contribution to the sustainable development of the region in the conditions of complex interdependency due to the requirements of the globalization.

Keywords: Balkan Universities Association, scientific network, glocalization, Balkan region

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Introduction

The crisis of the post- Cold World era led to the collapse of the bipolar word order and the emergence of a new global political structure. This new political structure started to question the notion of the classical Westphalia concept of state sovereignty. In fact, even during the Cold war era policy harmonization and issues of regional integration have been the principal domains of political science especially in International Relations (IR) since the end of the Second World War. The emergence of different supra-national organisations like EU and AU produced a variety of regional integration structures, which have the authority to develop collective policies. These collective formations at regional level are partly results of the dynamics of globalization and can be considered as a collective response to the challenges of globalization. (Woldegiogis, 2013)

After the collapse of the bipolar World order many states tend to use soft power in order to achieve their foreign policy goals. The number of countries that regard the education as the best mean to promote their national interests on the world stage is growing. (Amirbek, 2014) Especially big powers pay more and more attention to use the higher education as an effective instrumental source of soft power. The main reason behind this tendency is the increasing interdependency between states and the growing price of using hard power in foreign policy.

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By exploring the historical background, the membership, the various activities and projects put into practice or to be achieved in the forthcoming years by the BUA we will try to determine in general terms the importance of cooperation between universities as a kind of soft power in the Balkans. We will also try to find out their valuable contribution to the sustainable development of the region in the conditions of complex interdependency due to the requirements of the globalization.

Globalization, "World Society" and Internationalization in Higher Education

In the most general sense, globalization constitutes the framework of economic and academic trends that outline the world of the 21st century. (Altbach, 2007) In Babones' view, globalization corresponds to the growth of integrated world society and especially to the reterritorialization, structural power and the indigenization of international society. (Babones, 2019) The term of "world society" in IR is used by the English School to conceptualise the international society "not as a second-order society of societies but a first order society of individual human beings that together with the international society of states constitute a whole society of human institutions." (Babones, 2019, 294) World society is conceived here as an emergence of "common interests and common values that could form the basis for the development of common rules and institutions." (Bull, 1977) In the world society identified in this manner the main structures of power are security, production, finance and knowledge (Strange, 1988, 24-32). In the Babones' classification, six sources of power figure are military/security, political, economic/ production, credit, knowledge, and ideological networks of power (Babones, 2019, 301).

The possibilities of global collaboration, exchange of ideas, and knowledge transfer have never been greater than they are today. Universities now occupy the peak positions in global knowledge networks. (Meyer and al.,1977) They carry out many different policies and practices to get by the global academic environment. In this way, they seek to internationalize their institutions. Although the internationalization became a common phenomenon of the era of globalization it is not easy to conceptualize it because it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. To simplify, the internalization of higher education institutions is the process of integrating the institution and its key stakeholders -its students, faculty and staff- into a globalizing world. This new process necessitates a change in existing structures, operating modes, and mind-sets.

According to Yang (2002) internationalization that dates from ancient times provides awareness and interaction between countries through teaching, research, and service functions and refers to dialogue with the ultimate aim of achieving mutual understanding across cultural borders.

Universities are now at the core of a system of global academic stratification as a result of commodification and homogenization of higher education. (Erkilla, 2016, 179) According to Jons and Hoyler (2013), the neo-liberation of universities and the adaptation of performance culture embodied in competition for ranking mean "the existence of an Anglo-American academic hegemony in the early 21st century" (Jons and Hoyler, 2019, 51). In the conditions of inadequate conditions of global academic competition, this ranking system gives rise to pressures that produce isomorphism in the form of functionally equivalent researchers.

The non-western universities that desire to join the global academic elite seek after educational alliances with the top-tiered US and UK institutions.

The strategies that they set up to internationalize their institutions include internationalization of the curriculum, exchange programs, double degree programs, research collaborations, the attraction of star scientists and establishment of teaching and research consortia. (İshikawa, 2009, Jons and Hoyler, 2019).

Here, it is necessary to mention that he unification of global knowledge networks on Anglo-American patterns is due to the rise of English as «the» global language. English became the lingua academica and the lingua Americana of the entire World.

Glocalization and Regionalism versus Globalization

In practice, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are launching a variety of international initiatives while announcing their ambitions to become «global education institutions». But in practice many of these initiatives have a marginal impact on the institutions that launched them.

There have been various higher education policy reforms at regional level to overcome the challenges of globalization in the present knowledge based global economy. Universities have been involved in various internationalization processes. Most frequently they establish bilateral and multilateral cooperation across the World or within the region. (Woldegiorgis, 2013)

The models of internationalization emphasize the acculturation of international students into the host country culture rather than an exchange of cultural knowledge and ideas. Whereas the mission of HEI is to learn from the world rather than teach the world what the institution knows.

According to Patel and Lynch (2013), the glocalization in higher education is an appropriate alternative to internationalization. The glocalization looks after a positive learning experience and inspires enhancement of learners' global experience through a critical academic and cultural exchange of global and local socio-economic and political issues; the merger of global and local perspectives. Glocalization is reinforced by the notion of «third culture» building in which culturally different communities draw on their strength to form a respectful, engaging and inspiring third culture space. (Patel and Sooknanan, 2011, 6) Glocalization challenges the cultural relativist framework of accommodation and tolerance that supports internationalization. It rejects the cultural relativism and ethnocentrism stimulated by the globalization.

"New regionalism"

The issue of regionalism and policy harmonization in higher education at regional level attracts the academic researchers especially after the adaptation of the Bologna Process in Europe in 1999. More than 46 countries are actually members of the Bologna Process in the world.

Constructing a region is a process, which has to be based on initiatives and actors from the region, though it requires support of the outside actors like the EU and other international players. Here, region is assumed not as a territory but as a flexible concept of common interests as fora for partnership in pursuing and lobbying for common interests. Hettne defines regions as territorially based subsystems of the international system with many varieties and different degrees of integration. (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000)

The concept of «New Regionalism» emerged as theoretical interpretation of the third wave of regionalization which took the form of voluntary jurisdictional integration of different constellations of neighbouring countries all over the world. The establishment of different regional and global networks through different institutional and functional arrangements has changed the morphology of international relations significantly. Moreover, regions have been shaped more and more as networks of networks.

New regionalism takes place in the current multi-polar global order. New regionalism is different compared to the «old regionalism» because the processes of integration are happening more bellow and within than top-down and from outside. This multidimensional form of integration embraces different grounds of cooperation: economy, politics, social development, security and culture. It includes not only relations between states and national administrations but it also includes relations between many other societal actors (business, civil society etc.) In this respect, local communities are taking an increasing role in this process by developing different forms of cross-border cooperation.

Multidimensional cooperation between Turkey and the Balkan countries

In practice, today there are more intraregional academic mobility networks and collaborative activities than ever. Regional cooperation, based on common interests is a necessary pre-requisite for development of each of the countries involved. Many regional initiatives, which include many countries from the region, have been created in the Balkans since the collapse of the former Yugoslavia in 1990. Some of these initiatives are Central European Initiative, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, South East European Cooperative Initiative, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, Danube Cooperation Process.

However, the proliferation of regional organizations is not exempt from challenges and risks. Remaining challenges to the regional cooperation in the Balkans can be mentioned as:

• deficit of uniform approach to common problems;
• existence of competitive interests and different motivations among the stakeholders of the regional coop-eration;
• impact of the global financial crisis;
• Kosovo's status, the constitutional setup of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the problem to the name of Macedonia;
• high rates of unemployment, widespread poverty;
• social marginalization, political radicalization, ethnocentrism.

Stability in the Balkans is an important issue for Turkey and Europe. After the collapse of Yugoslavia, which started in 1990, Turkey has introduced many political, economic and cultural policies and programs towards Balkans. Since the1990s, education has been playing an important role in the public diplomacy pursued by Turkey and its achievements are noteworthy.

According to UNESCO (2014) data, the student inflow from neighbouring countries to Turkey has increased by %50 in the last decade, which implies Turkey's potential as

a regional hub in higher education. Based on Turkish Higher Education Council statistics, the number of international students in Turkey increased from 16.656 in 2000 to 108.076 in 2016/2017. (http://istatistik.yok.gov.tr)

Parallel to the developments in the world many achievements were gained in Turkey in this field. The main strategies of internationalization which have been developed by the Turkish Higher Education Council are: Bologna Process, TURQUAS Project, Erasmus and Erasmus+, Turkish grants, Mevlana Exchange Program, Joint Diploma Programs, project Based Exchange Programs, YABSIS Project etc. (YÖK Strategy Paper, 2015, 15)

The geographical proximity, cultural familiarity and historical ties between Turkey and Balkan countries are the main factors that contribute to incoming student mobility between these countries and Turkey. With 10 countries, reaching nearly 42 million people, Balkan countries form an important periphery region for Turkey.

Among ten counties, which sent maximum students to Turkey, figure only Greece that ranks eighth and Bulgaria, the tenth with respectively 2. 285 and 2.030. (YÖK Strategic Paper, 2015, 35) Syria is at the top of the list by sending 15.042 students.

Balkan Universities Association (BUA)

The Balkan Universities Association (BUA) was established in 2015 with the initiative of Trakya University which is the biggest and the oldest university in Thrace region. The permanent secretary of BUA is still located in Edirne. Together with Trakya University, 33 Balkan universities participated to the first meeting of BUA in Edirne. Nowadays the number of member universities from 11 Balkan countries has increased to 79. The countries with the highest number of members are Bulgaria and Greece, respectively with 19 and 10 universities' membership. It is important to emphasize that these two countries are at the same time the members of the EU. Turkey is represented in BUA by 11 universities whose majority is located in the Thrace region. By the way 5 of them cooperate in the Trace Universities Association and transfer their experiences to the BUA's fora. The country, which is represented by the least member, is Montenegro.

TABLE: Universities Members of BUA

Country	Universities
Turkey	Trakya University Kırklareli University Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Istanbul University Namık Kemal University Istanbul Technical University Mediterranean University İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University İstanbul Arel University Istanbul University of Health Sciences Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University
Greece	University of Ionnina SS. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje Ionian University National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH) Athens University of Economics and Business University of the Aegean- Mytiline Harokopio University of Athens
Romania	Andrei Saguna University Ovidius University of Constanta University of Bucharest
Bulgaria	Trakia University, Stara Zagora Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts St. Cyril and St. Metodius University of Veliko Tarnovo Anghel Kanchev University of Ruse University of Library Studies and Information Technologies Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski National Sports Academy «Vasil Levski» University of Business and Technology Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen Technical University of Gabrovo University of Food Technologies-Plovdiv «Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov» University South-West University «Neofit Rilski» Agricultural University Plovdiv Pleven Medical University Technical University of Sofia Medical University of Plovdiv European Polytechnical University Varna Free University

Bosnia and Herzegovina	Djemal Bijedic University of Mostar International University of Sarajevo University of Zenica University of Tuzla University of Sarajevo University of Bihać
Macedonia	University of Tetova International Balkan University University «St. Kliment Ohridski» International Vision University University of Western Macedonia University of Macedonia
Croatia	University of Zadar University of Applied Sciences Baltazar Zaprešić
Albania	Eqrem Çabej University of Gjirokastra Universiteti Aleksander Moisiu Durres Aleksander Xhuvani University of Elbasan Sports University of Tirana University of Medicine, Tirana Polytechnic University of Tirana University of Tirana University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" University of New York Tirana (UNYT) "Fan S. Noli" University of Korça
Serbia	International University of Novi Pazar University of Zagreb University of Niš
Kosovo	University of Prizren Ukshin Hoti Kadri Zeca University University of Gjakova « Fehmi Agani» University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" Haxhi Zeka University AAB College University of Mitrovica "Isa Boletini"
Montenegro	University of Montenegro

BUA's logo depicts mountains and rivers in the Balkans. The most striking element in the logo is the bridge symbolizing cultural partnership and transnational cooperation that connects the past to the future in this geography. The meanings that BUA logo evokes are reflected in the words of the Rector of Bucharest University Prof. Dr. Dimitru as follows: "I believe we have more in common than our differences. We need to undertake works that will strengthen our common points and develop the unity and the Balkans"

The primary aim of BUA is to determine a leading vision for the future through the universities, the libraries, the research centres in Balkan region on the base of common global values by considering the necessities of the time. Besides, forming up a scientific network in the areas of language, culture, art, history, economy, education and sports and caring out collaborative scientific works in these areas are the aims of BUA. Some others are;
- To improve an intercultural dialogue considering the importance of the region
- To form lasting and solid scientific cooperation from the past to the future
- To establish an association with universities that are active, acknowledged, followed and preferred in science and academic world on a global scale
- To make joint scientific studies, researches and innovation works
- To provide opportunities in methods, techniques and cooperation for increasing the efficiency of research and development activities
- To organize common cultural, artistic and sportive activities
- To organize exchange programs for academic staff (such as Erasmus and Mevlana Exchange Programs)
- To organize exchange programs for students (such as Erasmus and Mevlana Exchange Programs)
- To conduct mutual accreditation process
- To organize joint diploma programs
- To organize education in Balkan Languages
- To form a communication network which will enable to exchange of knowledge among academicians
- To form virtual specialization reserves
- To prepare and conduct joint scientific research projects and to conduct their applications" (http://www.baunas.org)

To this end, the BUA holds a plenary session once a year, and the rectors of the member universities develop the organization's next year's strategic action plan and evaluate new membership applications. During these annual meetings, conferences are organized to contribute to the academic development and educational quality of all member universities and to the social, cultural and economic development of the region. For example, the conference organised by the University of Bucharest, in Romania, at 8-10 June 2018 was entitled "Balancing Innovation and Tradition in Science Editing". The subject of the conference organised in Thessaloniki, in April 16-18, 2019 was "UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in the Balkan Region and the Role of Universities".

In terms of internationalization, there are only 5 BUA

universities in the list of the 20 Turkish universities that receive maximum international students: Istanbul University (7.671), Istanbul Aydın University (2.836), Marmara University (2.638), Istanbul Technical University (2.345) and Trakya University (1.900) (http:// istatistik.yok.gov.tr) The total number of students in Trakya University, which is a BUA member with the highest number of foreign students, is 36.000. The number of foreign students is 2.266 and the number of students coming from the Balkans is 1.920 in Trakya University. In terms of academic staff mobility many foreign scholars arrive in Turkey. Just Greece as a BUA member takes place in the 10 most popular universities. (THEC, 2015, 77)

The reasons for being below the desired level in the process of internationalization in terms of student mobility can be explained with the factors of insufficient number of programs in foreign language, lack of infrastructure for the integration of international students, insufficient academic and administrative staff who speak a foreign language, insufficiency of promotion and branding activities etc. In its Strategy Paper, the Higher Education Council (HEC) defines factors such as regional instability, negative perception of security, lack of recognition or equivalence of some regional universities as threats to the internationalization in Turkey. The same document draws attention to the importance of identifying and focusing on target / focus countries. Among the Balkan countries, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece are the countries with high potential to contribute to internationalization and are strategically prominent. (https://www.yok.gov.tr/ Documents/AnaSayfa/Yuksekogretimde_Uluslarara..)

CONCLUSION

In the post-cold war era, globalization has been an important determinant in the process of transformation and diversification of the international system and the relationship order of international actors. With the effect of globalization, various non-state players have joined the international system and started to be effective both at global and regional level. Among these actors the higher education institutions play an important role in the cross-border and cross- cultural relations. Trying to meet the requirements of globalization the universities started to apply different politics of internationalization and harmonization in order to be able to concurate with the top-tiered US and UK universities. As a negative effect of globalization the neo-liberalization of universities gives rise to pressures that produce isomorphism and functionally uniform researchers. The global academic stratification as another negative effect of globalization in the field of education leads to the hegemony of Anglo-American universities in the global academic competition. The non-western universities facing these challenges focus on several cooperation opportunities in order to join the global knowledge networks. Although the cooperation between universities at regional level is not a new phenomenon in the world it is a quite new trend in the Balkan region since the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. In fact, BUA is the second academic initiative in this region since the end of the Cold war. The first initiative belongs to Constanta University, Romania, which leaded the foundation of the Black Sea Universities Association Network (BSUN) in 1998. 120 universities from 12 countries from the Balkan and Black Sea region are actually the members of BSUN.

BUA was established in 2014 with the initiative of Trakya University and is converted today to NGO with its 69 members. BUA was designed and implemented as a mechanism of academic cooperation in the Balkan region. It is a regional societal actor with the potential to develop the necessary infrastructure to develop internationalization

policies pursued by member universities. On the other hand the BUA is an important instrument to be used by the universities of the region in order to face the challenges of the globalization by using local and global means at the same time. In terms of geopolitics, BUA is one of the most important players capable to contribute to the development of the Balkan region and to make peace and stability permanent in this region, which is even today still fragile in many respects.

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