TRANSFERRING EU HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL OFFICE PROFESSIONALS IN THIRD COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFERRING EU HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL OFFICE PROFESSIONALS IN THIRD COUNTRIES

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The European Union (EU) has become a major player in higher education over the years, although it does not have direct competence in this policy area. In time, the primary aim of encouraging cooperation between the Member States in the field of education has expanded beyond its members, particularly through an increasing number of initiatives such as the Bologna Process and the Erasmus Program. In the literature, the impact of the EU on the non-EU countries has been highlighted by various factors such as the growing geographic reach, funding, and participation rates. To identify such impacts, this study examines the perception, interpretation, and implementation of EU higher education programs within their internationalization practices by higher education institutions in selected three countries namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, and People's Republic of China. To investigate this objective, this study uses qualitative research methods, in which qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the International Office Professional (IOPs) from 13 institutions in these countries.

The thesis combines policy transfer literature with bottom-up Europeanization. The IOPs are the main unit of analysis in this study. By highlighting the significance of institutional filters and domestic contexts, the findings draw attention to the complexities in implementing the EU initiatives in non-EU countries. This study demonstrates that institutionalization and implementation of EU programs are also shaped by the institutional and national internationalization strategies and the nature of country's relations with the EU.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, People's Republic of China, European Union, Higher Education

ÖZ

AB YÜKSEKÖĞRETİM PROGRAMLARININ TRANSFERİ: ÜÇÜNCÜ ÜLKELERDEKİ ULUSLARARASI OFİS PROFESYONELLERİNİN ROLÜ

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Avrupa Birliği (AB), Avrupa para birliği gibi alanlarda sahip olduğu doğrudan yetkiye sahip olmasa da yıllar içinde yükseköğretim alanında da önemli bir aktör haline gelmiştir. Artan sayıda girişim ve program aracılığıyla AB, yükseköğretim alanındaki etkisini üye ülkelerinin ötesine taşımıştır. Coğrafi kapsama alanının, bütçelerin ve katılım oranlarının genişlemesi, AB'nin üye olmayan ülkeler üzerindeki etkisini vurgulamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki yükseköğretim kurumlarında görevli Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonellerinin, uluslararasılaşma pratikleri içinde AB yükseköğretim programlarını ve girişimlerini kurumsal ve ulusal bağlamlarında nasıl algıladığını, yorumladığını ve uyguladığını incelemektedir. Bu amacı araştırmak için, çalışmada nitel bir yöntem benimsenmiş ve bu ülkelerdeki 13 kurumun Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonelleri ile yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Bu araştırma politika transferi teorisi ile aşağıdan yukarıya Avrupalılaşma (Europeanization) perspektifini birleştiren teorik bir çerçeve kullanmaktadır. Çalışmanın temel analiz birimi ve ana aktörleri olarak ele alınan Uluslararası Ofis

Profesyonelleri, politika transferinin dinamikleri, karşılaşılan zorluklar ve AB programlarının kurumsallaştırılmasında kullanılan stratejiler üzerine ışık tutmaktadır. Bulgular, kurumsal filtrelerin ve yerel bağlamların önemine vurgu yaparak, AB girişimlerinin AB üyesi olmayan ülkelerde uygulanmasındaki karmaşıklıkları da ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, kurumsal ve ulusal (uluslararasılaşma) stratejileri ve ülkenin AB ile ilişkilerinin doğasının AB programlarının kurumsallaşması ve uygulanması sürecinde etkili olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bosna Hersek, Kazakistan, Çin, Avrupa Birliği, Yükseköğrenim

Hayat ışığımı kaybettiğim en zorlu anlarda bile bana UMUT olan canım oğluma

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Türkiye)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BD	District of Brčko
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BIP	Blended Intensive Program
BP	Bologna Process
CAMPUS Asia	Collective Action for Mobility Programs of University Students in Asia
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEEPUS	The Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies
CIs	Confucius Institutes
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COSME	EU Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DSI	Digital Skills Indicator
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EDRK	State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020
EEA	European Economic Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EMJMD	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EPCA	Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EU	European Union
EUA	European Universities Association
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FLHE	Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

Global UGRAD	The Global Undergraduate Exchange Program
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HPPD	People-to-People-Dialogue (People's Republic of China)
ICM	Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Program
ICO	International Cooperation Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTERREG	European Territorial Cooperation
IOPs	International Office Professionals
IPA	The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (EU)
IROs	International Relations Offices
KazAID	Kazakhstan Agency of International Development
LLP	Lifelong Learning Program
MES	Republic of Kazakhstan the Ministry of Education and Science
METU	Middle East Technical University
MOE	Chinese Ministry of Education
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PRC	People's Republic of China
RK	Republic of Kazakhstan
RS	Republica Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SAP	Stability and Association Pact
SCI	Study in China Initiative
SEE	Southeast Europe
STINT	Internationalization of Higher Education of BiH
TACIS	Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States
TEMPUS	Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICA	Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe
USA	United States of America
VAW	Violence Against Women
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization
YÖK	Yükseköğretim Kurulu (Turkish Higher Education Council)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, higher education institutions have become key actors in the process of internationalization, which has transformed into a critical pillar of their operations. Internationalization is not only an essential component of academic and institutional strategies but has also emerged as a significant metric in global university rankings. Universities are striving to host more international students, staff, and projects, reflecting their commitment to global engagement and competitiveness. Concurrently, student and staff mobility are growing rapidly, with young people traveling more frequently and seeking exposure to diverse cultures and countries, facilitated by advancements in communication technologies. As a result, mobility programs such as Erasmus and other international initiatives have gained substantial interest and participation. This growing emphasis on mobility underscores a need for a deeper understanding of the actors responsible for implementing these programs, particularly those working in international offices, whose roles are pivotal to the success of internationalization efforts.

This is being said, this section provides an overview of the study's main objectives and research questions, theoretical framework, significance of the study as well as its structure.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The European Union (EU) has emerged as a critical actor in shaping higher education policies, which has been accelerated especially with the help of globalization and development of communication technologies, although it does not have an explicit competence in the field of higher education. Through the programs like Tempus, Erasmus and so on, the EU has not only influenced its member states but also extended

its impact to non-EU countries, encouraging the adoption of European frameworks and standards. In that respect, the research presented in this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the International Office Professionals (IOPs) working in three selected non-EU countries' higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive, understand, respond and implement the processes and policies of the EU higher education programs, in their distinctive domestic and institutional contexts. The study focuses on three non-EU countries, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China, each with distinct institutional and societal environments and different types of relations with the EU. Such a case selection is aimed to offer a nuanced analysis of the policy transfer and the Europeanization in higher education.

The study combines the policy transfer theoretical framework with the bottom-up Europeanization perspective. This dissertation focuses on policy transfer framework as formulated by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) and as cited by several authors (James and Lodge, 2003; Lenz, 2006; Moisio, 2018). Policy transfer is the process of transferring, modifying, or modeling policies from one context to another, where the borrowing, adaptation and application of policies in diverse institutional and legal contexts becomes a main research concern to explore. This framework emphasizes important components like the actors involved, the reasons for the transfer and the difficulties faced. Policy transfer in higher education is essential to comprehending how non-EU countries adopt and modify the European policies to suit their distinct educational frameworks.

Furthermore, with an emphasis on how domestic actors, especially those in higher education institutions, understand and react to EU policies, this thesis also applies theoretical framework of Europeanization from a bottom-up sociological institutionalist perspective (Radaelli, 2004; Jacquot & Woll, 2003; Börzel & Risse 2000; Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002). The bottom-up Europeanization, which places a strong emphasis on the agency of domestic actors as well as the influence of contextual factors adopts a more nuanced perspective than top-down approach, which sees Europeanization as a one-way imposition of EU norms from the EU level onto the domestic level. Hence, by emphasizing the IOPs as intermediaries within their

institutions, the bottom-up perspective adds a more intricate, actor-centered analysis to the structured method of policy transfer.

By focusing on the IOPs as the main unit of analysis, the study aims to understand the complex processes of policy transfer in the field of higher education from a bottom-up perspective under the influence of the European education programs. It is important to indicate that the adoption of the policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization theoretical frameworks is both selective and critical, reflecting their strengths and limitations in explaining the dynamics of EU higher education policies in non-EU contexts. From the policy transfer framework, the aspects that focus on the mechanisms of transfer (e.g., voluntary, coercive, or mixed), the actors involved (e.g., international office professionals, institutional administrators, national authorities), and the constraints on transfer (e.g., structural or institutional challenges) are found highly relevant. These elements are expected to provide insights into the processes and dynamics of transferring EU policies into local contexts. From the bottom-up Europeanization framework, its focus on actor-centered approaches and the interplay between domestic and European contexts are highly applicable and adopted. It allows for an exploration of the agency and expertise of the IOPs in mediating between institutional, national, and EU levels. Bottom-up Europeanization is selected as a complementary conceptual framework for this study, but it is not chosen to evaluate or measure the extent to which the selected countries—such as China—have become "Europeanized." Instead, it is adopted solely for its value as a toolkit, offering explanatory power to interpret the findings from the interviews and to better understand how EU programs are perceived and mediated within the specific contexts of the studied countries.

Hence, by positioning itself between these two frameworks, this dissertation adopts a hybrid approach that integrates the transferable elements of both while also addressing their limitations and to overcome such limitations. The policy transfer framework, as developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000), offers a structured approach to analyze transfer processes, extend its applicability beyond the EU's influence on member states and adaptation pressures to various contexts. Similarly, bottom-up Europeanization provides an added-value due to its emphasis on actors and local

dynamics, ability to incorporate mediating variables—such as veto players—to explain the findings of the interviews and study's focus on EU higher education programs. Together, these frameworks are intended to provide an analytical lens to explore the interplay between EU policies and institutional practices across differing national and institutional contexts.

Examining the Europeanization and policy transfer in the field of higher education will focus on three non-EU countries, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, and Kazakhstan. These countries were selected for a number of strategic reasons. Initially, they are chosen because of their varied levels of economic development, higher education systems, financial investments in higher education, internationalization initiatives and political structures. These variations facilitate comparative analysis, allowing for a more in-depth investigation of the ways in which EU higher education programs are viewed, modified, and applied in different domestic settings. Moreover, although they all participate in the EU programs like Erasmus as third countries not associated to the Programme, their familiarity with these programs and how they are incorporated into European Higher Education Area varies greatly too. Although geographically and politically far from the EU, China participates in EU educational programs like Erasmus as part of its larger internationalization strategy; Kazakhstan, a central Asian country, has also become more involved in European higher education initiatives, particularly through the Bologna Process; and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a candidate country to the EU, has a stake in conforming to EU standards. Furthermore, each country's relationship with the EU adds a significant dimension to the analysis. As a candidate for the EU membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina is working to align its policies with the EU norms. Meanwhile, China is a global competitor and distinct political and economic system with its own unique internationalization strategies and limited reliance on EU frameworks, while Kazakhstan is a significant regional ally of the EU in terms of regional security and energy interests. The interaction of local, national, and international dynamics in the policy transfer and Europeanization of higher education is also marked by this divergent relationship with the EU.

The International Office Professionals (IOPs) are the study's main unit of analysis because of their crucial function as intermediaries in the transfer, execution, adaptation

and integration of the EU higher education initiatives and programs into institutional practices. Because of their peculiar position at the intersection of national authorities, international frameworks and institutional administration, these professionals are essential in negotiating the challenges of Europeanization and policy transfer. In contrast to national policy makers or senior institutional leaders, the IOPs are directly involved in the operational facets of internationalization and EU programs. They are in charge of ensuring the effective implementation of the EU program procedures within their institutions and have extensive knowledge of them. Even though they do not have formal decision-making powers, their knowledge and advisory role frequently have an impact on the decisions at a higher level, making them crucial participants in the bottom-up dynamics of policy implementation.

At this point, in order to clarify the research questions, scope, and boundaries of this thesis more, it is critical to state that while internationalization of higher education serves as the overarching phenomenon under consideration, this research does not directly analyze internationalization in its entirety. Instead, it concentrates on a particular facet—the participation in and adaptation of the EU programs—and how this aspect contributes to the broader process of internationalization. Internationalization, in this context, is acknowledged as a phenomenon rather than a theoretical framework, providing the backdrop against which the specific interactions and adaptations of the EU programs are studied. This thesis investigates how individual countries integrate into the global landscape through the lens of internationalization, with a specific focus on their engagement with the EU higher education programs. By employing the theoretical lenses of policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization, the study examines the pivotal role of the IOPs as key agents in mediating and implementing these EU initiatives within their respective institutions.

However, it would be instructive to give an academic and brief definition of internationalization in higher education as an umbrella phenomenon as well as the most prominent discussions in the literature of internationalization. Universities have traditionally been centers for the production of universal knowledge. Yet, factors such as the development of a global knowledge economy, advancements in digital

technologies, and the forces of globalization have significantly accelerated the pace of internationalization within higher education institutions. This is being said, internationalization of higher education is a multidimensional and expansive concept, addressed through numerous perspectives and frameworks in the academic literature. It encompasses a range of processes, including student and staff mobility, international research collaborations, curriculum internationalization, and the establishment of transnational education programs. The field has been shaped by significant contributions from prominent scholars such as Jane Knight (2004, 2007, 2012), Philip G. Altbach (2007), Hans de Wit (2015), and Simon Marginson (2002), among others, who have extensively explored its complexities, challenges, and implications.

As one of the most significant additions to the body of literature, Knight (2012) describes various interpretations of internationalization within higher education. She identifies two primary modes: “internationalization at home” which involves incorporating international, intercultural, or global dimensions into the curriculum and teaching processes, and “internationalization via cross-border education” which entails delivering education to other countries through arrangements like branch campuses or franchises utilizing diverse delivery methods. In this regard, Knight (2012) offers a working definition: *"internationalization is the process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the goals, primary functions and delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels* (Knight, 2012)*"*. She emphasizes that internationalization should serve as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, expressing concern over the emerging associations of internationalization with objectives like improving rankings, generating profit, or exerting soft power, and the values of competitiveness and commercialization that accompany these goals (Knight, 2012).

As other important contributions to the literature, Altbach and Knight (2007) further analyze the motivations driving internationalization, highlighting economic, academic, and socio-political factors. Moreover, De Wit (2015) contributes to understanding the policy and governance aspects, arguing for the alignment of internationalization strategies with institutional and national goals. Furthermore, Marginson (2002) introduces the "glonacal agency heuristic," which examines the

interplay between global, national, and local dynamics in shaping internationalization processes. On the other hand, Ulrich Teichler's research has been instrumental in understanding the European dimension of internationalization, particularly through initiatives like the Erasmus program. Teichler (2004) examines how regional integration efforts such as the Bologna Process have transformed European higher education, creating a model for global engagement while addressing challenges of harmonization and equity. Another critical area of discussion is the commodification and marketization of higher education, where internationalization is increasingly tied to revenue generation through international student recruitment and transnational education programs. Eva Hartmann (2008) critiques the dominance of economic motives in shaping internationalization policies, arguing that these trends risk prioritizing profit over academic values and equity. Similarly, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) address the neoliberal underpinnings of internationalization, exploring their implications for social justice and access to education. Recent literature also explores the role of digitalization in reshaping internationalization practices. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual mobility and collaborative online international learning models, as highlighted by Helms et al. (2020). Collectively, these scholars build a robust theoretical framework that continues to guide discussions on internationalization in higher education. Hence, the literature on internationalization of higher education is extensive and evolving, reflecting the dynamic interplay of opportunities and challenges in a globalized academic landscape.

Against this background, this thesis seeks to address the following research questions, which points out to the relationship of the IOPs with different levels of policy making and implementation, namely at the institutional and national levels:

1. Can the IOPs, as the main unit of analysis, influence intermediate or upper-level actors from the bottom? In that sense, what roles do the IOPs play in the policy transfer and implementation process within the organizational hierarchy of their institutions, with regard to the EU higher education programs?

2. What challenges and difficulties do the IOPs encounter during the policy transfer and implementation of the EU higher education programs into their unique

institutional and national contexts? How do the IOPs navigate and address these challenges in their respective institutional and national frameworks?

3. How do distinct institutional and national settings of these three countries and different forms of relations with the EU influence the interpretation, implementation, and outcomes of the EU higher education programs?

4. How do IOPs in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China perceive and interpret the EU higher education programs and policies within their domestic and institutional contexts?

In order to answer above research questions, this study employs a qualitative research design. Qualitative data are collected through semi-structured interviews with the IOPs at 13 different institutions in three different countries (three institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, four institutions from Republic of Kazakhstan and six institutions from the People's Republic of China), with the approval of the Ethical Committee (protocol no. 0452-ODTUİAEK-2024). The interviews took place in the period of August-November 2024. Although the sample size might not initially seem large, the participants' perspectives are highly relevant and reflective of the institutional realities of policy implementation because they were all International Office Professionals with direct involvement in international programs, EU higher education initiatives, international projects as well as international students and faculty staff. Moreover, the qualitative data is significantly diverse and deepened by the inclusion of participants from three different country contexts, each with its own distinct institutional, cultural, and geographic features. Consequently, the sample is a strong and significant dataset that successfully captures the complexities and nuances of the study's research questions.

In addition to the qualitative data, the country contexts are also examined on the basis of the available academic resources and reports. Integrating qualitative research methods with the theoretical perspectives of policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization embedded into the specific country context of each country provides

a structured, yet flexible approach to investigating the complex phenomena this dissertation seeks to comprehend. As this study's goal is to investigate the IOPs' comprehension and interpretation of the EU higher education programs, not to quantify their impact, this inevitably results in the application of a qualitative research design. Furthermore, because the goal of this study is to understand contextual differences rather than universal ones, the bottom-up research design is already relevant and applicable.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is multifaceted. However, in order to better explain the originality of the study, it would be useful to first briefly visit the relevant literature; thus, the place of this study in the literature and its difference from other studies can be better understood.

First of all, there are several articles employed the policy transfer framework to analyze the adoption and implementation of policies across different policy areas such as e-government (Benson, 2021), health systems (Witter et.al., 2019) and environment (Alibaši & Atkinson, 2023). Similar to this dissertation highlighting the influence of institutional and domestic contexts, Benson (2021)’s findings reveals that the transfer was often conditional, influenced by Nigeria's financial and technological dependencies, while the study of Alibaši and Atkinson (2023) highlight the inherent complexities and difficulties of the policy transfer process, especially in the context of domestic conditions. On the other hand, as the second pillar of this study’s theoretical framework, bottom-up Europeanization has been explored in various studies, each offering insights into how domestic actors influence EU policies and integration processes in different policy areas such as audiovisual media (Broughton Micova, 2010), civil society organizations (Trenz, 2014).

Moreover, there are also several studies that employed similar theoretical frameworks to analyze higher education policies. For instance, Yijun Yang's study (2023) examines from a structure-agency perspective, the complexities of educational policy transfer by analyzing China's adoption of Japanese vocational education during the

late Qing Dynasty. Similarly, Perry and Tor (2009) examine the processes and multiple mechanisms and forms of educational transfer, including direct borrowing (Rose 1991; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000), lending, diffusion, and imposition, emphasizing the importance of both global influences and local adaptations. The authors highlight the dual dynamics of global standardization and localized hybridization, where educational policies are not merely adopted but transformed, leading to unexpected outcomes such as creative deviations and missed universalization. They highlight that successful policy transfer requires careful consideration of the socio-political and cultural environments of both the source and recipient contexts. This aligns with the findings of this thesis, which underscore the significance of domestic and institutional contexts in the implementation of EU higher education programs (Perry & Tor, 2009).

Furthermore, when examined on a country-specific basis, it is evident that there are studies analyzing each country individually through the lenses of policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization, focusing on various policy areas. Several studies employ the policy transfer framework to analyze Bosnia and Herzegovina in fields such as environmental governance (Alibašić and Atkinson, 2023) and the rule of law (Coman, 2017), as well as Europeanization (Majstorović, 2007; Ćerimagić, 2017; Brljavac, 2011; Bosnjak, 2020) and the internationalization of higher education (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2009; Zgaga et al., 2013; Markovic et al., 2021). Similarly, research on Kazakhstan includes policy transfer studies in economics (Howie, 2018) and foreign policy (Schoenfeld, 2020), Europeanization (Yesdauletov, Oralov, et al., 2017), and internationalization of higher education (Bednyakova, 2014; Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016; AllahMorad, 2021; Nadirova, 2022). In the case of China, scholarly attention spans various fields, including the urban land system and urban renewal (Romano, 2020; Xiong and Wang, 2022), authoritarian regimes (Duong, 2023), and its relations with actors such as the UN (Sebastian and Waisbich, 2024) and Africa (Lammich, 2022). Studies also explore Europeanization (ETNC, 2015) and the internationalization of higher education in China (Cai, 2013; Cai & Yan, 2017; Wu, 2017; d'Hooghe et al., 2018; Zhu, 2021; Zhang & Yu, 2021; Guo et al., 2022).

Going back to the original contribution of this dissertation after this short literature review, first of all, it must be stated that the originality of this study mostly lies in the

incorporation of bottom-up Europeanization frameworks and policy transfer. Policy transfers framework outlined by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996; 2000) offers a methodical tool for examining the actors and processes involved in modifying policies for use in various institutional and legal contexts. On the other hand, bottom-up Europeanization emphasizes how domestic actors can interpret and modify the EU policies in their unique institutional and national contexts. By integrating these frameworks, the thesis is aimed to address the particular difficulties presented by higher education as a soft law policy domain, where the EU's influence depends more on persuasion and voluntary involvement than on legally binding regulations. A more sophisticated understanding of how policies are modified and applied in situations that do not always fit into conventional Europeanization models is provided by this dual approach.

The decision to combine the policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization frameworks stems from their complementary strengths in analyzing EU higher education policy adaptation. Policy transfers effectively explains the structural and procedural aspects of policy diffusion across borders, while bottom-up Europeanization focuses on the agency of local actors and the contextual interpretation of policies. Using either framework alone would have left gaps: policy transfer lacks emphasis on micro-level dynamics, and bottom-up Europeanization underrepresents cross-border mechanisms and non-EU contexts. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens to examine how EU programs are interpreted, negotiated, and implemented across diverse institutional and national settings.

In addition, as mentioned above, although there are studies examining each of the three countries individually with similar theoretical frameworks, no study has been found comparing these three countries in one single research with these theoretical frameworks; for this reason, the three selected countries and their comparative analysis in one single research is another most original aspect of the study.

Furthermore, thesis adds to the body of literature by emphasizing the complexities in transferring policies in a soft policy area where there is a lack of clear enforcement. This study highlights the complexities in determining "what to transfer" and "how to

transfer" in a field like higher education, where adaptation is heavily context-dependent, in contrast to studies that concentrate on hard policy areas.

Moreover, most of the existing research on EU higher education programs such as Erasmus focuses on its intra-European aspects, analyzing how it can improve participants' employability and intercultural skills (European Commission, 2016; Bracht et al., 2006) or cultivate a collective European identity (Teichler, 2004; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Kinginger, 2009; Psychogyiou, 2015; Kuhn, 2012; Mitchell, 2012). Even though these studies have provided insightful information, they primarily concentrate on the experiences of students in the EU member states or candidate countries, frequently not analyzing the viewpoints of the actors who carry out these programs or the contexts in non-European countries. Hence, this thesis offers a unique and distinctive addition to the literature on Europeanization, policy transfer, and Erasmus programs by reorienting the emphasis from mainstream themes like employability, European identity, and personal skill development to the operational viewpoints of International Office Professionals (IOPs) in non-EU nations.

As the literature on the EU higher education programs and Erasmus largely concentrates on European contexts, this study also contributes on the literature by analyzing programs' influence beyond the EU, offering a nuanced analysis of three non-EU countries with distinct political, economic, and cultural contexts. Scholarly research conducted outside of Europe has mostly concentrated on top-down analyses, such as macro-level studies or European Commission reports on structural changes brought about by initiatives like Tempus (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000). These studies do not, however, offer much insight into the actor-driven, micro-level procedures that incorporate international programs into institutional procedures. This dissertation provides a more detailed perspective of how the IOPs operationalize, modify, and carry out EU initiatives in various institutional and national contexts by focusing on their experiences and roles in non-EU countries.

Moreover, this study expands the conceptual and empirical reach of previous research by also concentrating on a particular set of institutional actors: International Office Professionals (IOPs). Although bottom-up Europeanization has been used more and

more to examine the function of institutional agency and domestic intermediaries (Börzel & Risse, 2000; Jacquot & Woll, 2003), its empirical applications have mostly been limited to surrounding regions or EU member states. Few studies examine their active role in mediating between external policy frameworks and local contexts, in non-EU countries, despite the fact that the majority of the literature currently available on international offices concentrates on their administrative responsibilities or internal management practices (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011, Bulut Şahin, 2023). Hence by emphasizing the IOPs as crucial intermediaries in the processes of internationalization and policy transfer and positioning them as key policy actors in non-European context beyond EU countries, this research offers a peculiar contribution.

In summary, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a comparative analysis across diverse non-EU countries, integrating multiple theoretical frameworks to examine policy transfer and Europeanization, and providing empirical insights into the roles of IOPs in implementing international education policies. By concentrating on the non-EU contexts and the perspectives of IOPs, this thesis does not only close a gap in the literature on EU higher education programs but also provides a novel analytical framework that integrates the frameworks of bottom-up Europeanization and policy transfer. It also stands out as a significant contribution to scholarly and applied discussions on internationalization and policy adaptation in higher education due to its emphasis on the complexities of higher education as a soft policy domain.

1.3 Structure of the Study

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The research topic is introduced in this introduction chapter, along with the study's significance and goal. It gives a summary of the theoretical framework, research questions, and the study's original contribution to the body of literature. Additionally, the chapter provides a thesis structure road map that directs the reader through the following chapters.

The study’s two main theoretical pillars—policy transfer and Europeanization—are examined in Chapter 2. With an emphasis on the EU context, it looks at policy transfer

as an organized method of comprehending how policies are adopted, modified, and put into practice. The chapter also highlights the mediating factors that affect policy adaptation, distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up research designs, and talks about Europeanization.

In Chapter 3, the EU's higher education policies and initiatives, such as Erasmus, Tempus, and the Bologna Process, are briefly presented. This part of the thesis takes a look at how the EU's higher education program have evolved over time and how they affect both EU members and non-EU countries.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the three chosen countries, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the People's Republic of China, describing their institutional, political and historical contexts as well as their relationships with the EU and the reflections of these relations in the field of higher education. In this part, all three countries were analyzed under the same headings and sub-headings, namely "National Qualifications of Higher Education, Higher Education Funding, Internationalization of Higher Education, the Patterns of Country-EU Relations, Reflections of the EU-Country Relationship on Higher Education" to enable a systematic presentation of their higher education systems. By structuring the analysis under these identical sub-headings, the chapter facilitates a comparative approach, allowing for an in-depth examination of similarities and differences across the three country cases.

Chapter 5 describes the qualitative research methods used in the study, along with the justification for choosing the three countries and international office professionals as the primary unit of analysis. This part of the thesis also informs the readers about the interview process, the procedures for gathering and analyzing data, as well as validity, reliability, and ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the qualitative data collected originally for this study, in a way to address the research questions through categorized themes and sub-themes. In this chapter of the thesis, the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data are elaborated using both the frequency analysis conducted with MAXQDA and

the research questions guiding the study. The findings are organized thematically under four main themes namely “Institutional Perception and Positioning of IROs; Strategic Role and Influence of EU Programs in Institutional and National Policies; Pressures, Challenges and Decision-Making Dynamics in Policy Adaptation; and Adaptation, Resistance and Support in Institutional and National Levels” and relevant sub-themes, as well as being analyzed on a country-by-country basis to capture contextual nuances. Additionally, each theme and sub-theme is discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the study, demonstrating how the findings align with or contribute to the broader theoretical context.

Lastly, the concluding chapter of the thesis summarizes the study's objectives, theoretical framework, and most significant findings. It revisits the theoretical framework to assess its explanatory power in addressing the study's results, highlighting the areas where the combined use of two theoretical frameworks has been effective and where it has fallen short. Additionally, the concluding chapter discusses the limitations of both the study and the theoretical frameworks used, outlines the research's contributions to the literature, and provides suggestions for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

With a particular attention to the field of higher education, this thesis intends to analyze the policy transfer policies of selected three countries namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, with regard to their policies, implementations and actors effective in the implementation of the EU-induced programs. More specifically, the purpose of this research is to genuinely understand the domestic dynamics of non-EU higher education institutions, as well as how these organizations and their International Office Professionals perceive, understand, and respond to the processes and policies of Europeanization and how the EU-induced programs have affected their educational and professional practices.

In order to explore the offered subject, this study will utilize the framework of policy transfer and Europeanization, particularly the sociological institutionalist approach with a specific focus on bottom-up research design. In this research, policy transfer and Europeanization frameworks are complementary as they both address the dynamics of policy change and adoption, yet in different contexts.

The literature on the Europeanization and policy transfer can be regarded as two complimentary frameworks that provide significant theoretical tools for analyzing how the EU affects domestic policies of member and non-member countries. Policy transfer provides a genuine understanding for the process in which actors learn policies, standards and best practices from other actors, states and non-state actors (like the EU) in today's multi-centered policy making process; while the Europeanization literature provides different mechanisms and mediating factors that can explain the

likelihood of this change and transfer. Because of their unique but concurrently entwined relationship—both frameworks address the dynamics of policy change and adoption but in different contexts—the frameworks of policy transfer and Europeanization will be used complementary in this study. While Europeanization focuses on how European integration affects domestic policies, the perspective of policy transfer examines how policies are transferred across different contexts, including between countries and international organizations. Hence, comprehending the interrelationship between these two frameworks can facilitate a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamic nature inherent in contemporary policymaking processes in the context of European impact outside the EU.

Consequently, this chapter intends to introduce the elements and complementary use of policy transfer framework and the Europeanization literature in a way to grasp the perceptions, responses and adaptations of non-EU members participating in EU higher education programs. The chapter is structured as follows. The first part explains the policy transfer framework with references to the main studies of the literature and with the emphases on definitions, categories, actors, forms and degrees of transfer; to be followed by a sub-section about policy transfer from the EU, a growing platform of transfer in many policy areas as well as its modes of governance. The following part analyzes the Europeanization framework with a specific focus on its top-down and bottom-up mechanisms. The Europeanization section also has a sub-section focusing on the mediating factors through a particular concentration on rationalist institutionalism/logic of consequences and sociological institutionalism/logic of appropriateness. The last part of the chapter is an effort to conclude with the theoretical design of this thesis.

2.2 Policy Transfer

In the literature of policy making, policy transfer represents an important milestone with considerable explanatory power and applicability in today's multi-centered world. This is because, governments are increasingly turning their faces to overseas, when they are seeking legislative answers for novel or difficult issues. The policy

transfer is not a new phenomenon; nevertheless, due to the technological advances and communication tools developed over the past decade, it is far easier and faster now than it was for policy makers to communicate and exchange ideas and knowledge with each other, which also fosters the process of policy transfer. International meetings between politicians and civil servants have become more common, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Policy entrepreneurs also market their policies globally and ideas are developed and pushed by advocacy coalitions, international policy networks, and epistemic communities (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Within this environment, in order to apply best practices that might work with their system, policymakers observe the policies of other policy makers. As a result, the international arena has seen a rise in the use of policy learning and transfer tools to alter national political implementations. In this regard, policy transfer, or the transfer of other countries' know-how regarding the best practices in the field of policy making is considered to be important for maintaining national competitiveness, because it empowers policy makers to carry out the best practices for their countries' development (Selek Meydanlı, 2013).

Over the last thirty years, there has been an increasing amount of research and analysis on the topic of "lesson learning," which is closely related to lesson drawing, policy convergence, and policy diffusion. Some of the authors of this literature include Giandonenico (1991), Rose (1991), Adler & Haas (1992), and Coleman (1994) (Yurdaanık Eskiyerli, 2013). Numerous terms (lesson-drawing, policy transfer, policy diffusion, and policy convergence) emerged to describe the process of "learning from abroad," and during the last two decades of the 20th century, the topic attracted a lot of attention from academics. The first wave of theoretical work was based on the general proposition that governments should look to other governments that have met a similar or related challenge by implementing a specific policy instrument or reaching a desirable outcome, as their capacity to solve complex problems is limited (Glaseri et al., 2022). These early studies focused primarily on the object, geographic proximity, and resource similarities of the policy transfer, rather than giving much thought to the content of the policies being transferred. Furthermore, the majority of analyses were criticized as being state-centric and neglected the potential involvement of other actors in the transfer. The approach's weakness became apparent in the 1990s, when other actors were involved in the process and policy content was added to the problem,

instead of just the process itself. As a result, policy transfer analyses came into being (Yurdaanık Eskiyerli, 2013).

The underlying assumptions of lesson drawing research have drawn criticism because they presume that the drawing process was both intentional and voluntary. Seeing that the latter can happen once a government or supranational institution is pressuring or even coercing another to accept a set of policy innovations to get beyond these arguments, Dolowitz, and Marsh (1996) invented the term "policy transfer" to refer to both voluntary and coercive forms of practice. Policy learning also refers to the knowledge transfer, but it is more of a voluntary process. One could argue that, despite its obvious connections to concepts such as policy diffusion, lesson drawing, and policy invocation, policy transfer is still a distinct field of study on its own at this point. The work by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) can be seen as a pivotal moment in the development of the concept. Dolowitz and Marsh thoroughly analyzed the policy transfer literature in 1996, which was almost thirty years ago. It helped to establish policy transfer as a separate field of study at a time when the body of research was still rather dispersed. Four years later, the writers themselves revisited the subject, and its application continued to expand. (Benson & Jordan, 2011)

Hence, the frequently referenced policy transfer framework proposed by Dolowitz and Marsh represents a significant turning point. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), policy transfer refers to *"a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place"* (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). Their research was based on Rose's study dated 1993. As cited by James and Lodge (2003), Rose (1993) examines the ways in which policymakers' discontent with the current state of affairs and their decisions—which they believe could be implemented in another setting—lead to the drawing of lessons. The application of the lesson-drawing perspective enhances the understanding of rational policy making and makes it possible to evaluate policy makers' actions against a standard of lesson-drawing behavior. Works in favor of policy transfer define it even more broadly, making it difficult to differentiate it from rational policy making and from a range of other concepts related to policy making. Policy transfer encompasses

lessons from coercive processes and other forms of voluntary adoption, while lesson drawing is more broadly based and closely resembles the conventional explanation of how policy makers attempt to make rational policy decisions. Coercive transfer where a government or supranational organization forces another government to adopt a policy and voluntary adoption-which aims to incorporate Rose's lesson-drawing are the two approaches to policy transfer (James & Lodge, 2003).

As cited by Lenz (2006), Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) created a comprehensive policy transfer model by combining research on "policy learning" (Hall 1993), "policy convergence" (Bennett, 1991), "policy diffusion" (Walker 1969, Gray 1973), and "lesson drawing" (Rose, 1993) into a single framework. Each of these models aims to clarify how policies transcend temporal and spatial borders. Lenz (2006) claims that the primary application of the policy transfer model, which was initially created and implemented for the EU, is in comparative public policy research. However, in doing so, it focuses mainly on the transfer of policies within the EU, between member states and between the various EU levels, mainly the national and supranational level (Lenz, 2006).

On the other hand, according to Yurdaanık Eskiyerli (2013), if the theory is described as a collection of analytically related statements, including generalizations that resemble laws and can be empirically tested, then policy transfer does not necessarily meet this definition. It functions more like a model that can explain things and is essential to the use of power (Yurdaanık Eskiyerli, 2013). Similarly, as cited by Lenz (2006), rather than being a complete theory, the policy transfer model is better described by Steffenson (2002) as a guide for investigating various policy-making procedures. It facilitates the process's identification of key variables and enables analysis of its peculiarities (Lenz, 2006).

As explained above, terminology may vary, as policy transfer is also called as lesson-drawing, policy convergence, policy diffusion etc. in different sources, while all refer to different forms of policy transfer actually. In this regard, Evans, and Davies (1999) argue that policy transfer should be analyzed only for action-oriented and intentional processes, while policy convergence may also occur unintentionally. On the other

hand, Dale (1994) lists eight mechanisms under policy transfer, as cited by Moisio (2018): borrowing, learning, teaching, harmonization, dissemination, standardization, establishing interdependence, and imposition. According to Moisio, all of these mechanisms are collectively referred to as "policy transfer," which includes both voluntary and coercive transfer carried out by diverse actors and under various conditions (Moisio, 2018). Therefore, it could be argued that the concept of policy transfer is inclusive and can be applied to various processes such as policy learning, borrowing, convergence, and so forth.

Why Transfer? Continuum Want To..... Have To			Who Is Involved in Transfer?	What Is Transferred?		From Where		Degrees of Transfer	Constraints on Transfer	How To Demonstrate Policy Transfer	How Transfer leads to Policy Failure
Voluntary	Mixtures	Coercive			Past	Within-a Nation	Cross-National				
Lesson Drawing (Perfect Rationality)	Lesson Drawing (Bounded Rationality)	Direct Imposition	Elected Officials	Policies (Goals) (content) (instruments)	Internal	State Governments	International Organizations	Copying	Policy Complexity (Newspaper) (Magazine) (TV) (Radio)	Media	Uniformed Transfer
	International Pressures		Bureaucrats Civil Servants	Programs	Global	City Governments	Regional State Local Governments	Emulation	Past Policies	Reports	Incomplete Transfer
	(Image) (Consensus) (Perceptions)									(Commissioned) (uncommissioned)	
	Externalities	Pressure Groups	Institutions			Local Authorities		Mixtures	Structural Institutional	Conferences	Inappropriate Transfer
	Conditionality	Political Parties	Ideologies					Inspiration	Feasibility	Meetings/ Visits	
	(Loans) (Conditions Attached to Business Activity)								(Ideology) (cultural proximity) (technology) (economic) (bureaucratic)		
	Obligations	Policy Entrepreneurs/ Experts	Attitudes/ Cultural Values						Language	Statements (written) (verbal)	
			Consultants Think Tanks Transnational Corporations Supranational Institutions	Negative Lessons			Past Relations				

Figure 2.1 A Policy Transfer Framework.

Source: Dolowitz D. & March D. (2000). *Learning From Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making.* Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration. (p.9).

In addition to its very definition, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) proposed a framework and model of policy transfer presented in the Figure 2.1 above, in which policy transfer is essentially treated as a dependent variable to be explained. The framework suggested by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) in the Figure 2.1 provides researchers a well-defined research tool and a systematic approach of various actors' roles in the transfer of policies as well as the mechanisms that facilitate such transfers-all essential components in the transfer of policy, which helps to grasp the complicated dynamics

of policy transfer in different contexts. Their framework is based on six questions; *"Why do actors engage in policy transfer? Who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process? What is transferred? From where are lessons drawn? What are the different degrees of transfer? What restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process? How is the process of policy transfer related to policy success or policy failure?"* (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). These questions that the policy transfer framework raises underline the characteristics of the transfer or the reasons behind it.

Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) list seven categories that could be transferred; policy goals, structure, and content; policy instruments or administrative techniques; institutions; ideology; ideas, attitudes and concepts and negative lessons. They identify nine types of actors (originally six in their initial work) that might engage in transfer activities; elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/experts, supra-national institutions, transnational corporations, think-tanks, non-governmental institutions and consultants (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000).

Also, within the framework of Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), there are three different forms of transfer: voluntary, direct coercive and indirect coercive. The motivation behind the voluntary transfer is the existence of dissatisfaction or problem with the status quo and there is not a hard and coercive mean. On the other hand, direct coercive transfer refers to forcing another actor to adopt a policy such as the requirements of IMF or EU Court of Justice. Unlikely, indirect coercive transfer implies the prospective role of externalities such as technology, economic pressures or the fear of being left behind which may indirectly push a government towards policy transfer. Due to being a member of international regimes and structures, national governments may be forced to adopt certain policies and programs; as mentioned above, the EU Court of Justice can require member states to comply with its directives as a part of their obligations and responsibilities of membership. Nevertheless, since their participation in such international structures, collaborations and bodies are still voluntary, whether this act of the EU is considered as coercive or not is still a question to discuss (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000).

Yılmaz (2017) explains the forms of transfer proposed by Dolowitz and Marsh in a way that, on one extreme of the spectrum, domestic actors search for voluntary and rational policy transfer that is sparked by the issues in the area in question. This approach is equated in the literature with the lesson-drawing model. The model's premise is that rational actors decide to switch policies when faced with serious policy issues or policy failures that make policymakers unhappy with the current state of affairs. Being aware that the existing course of action is ineffective, decision-makers look for voluntary alternatives to existing policies in order to address issues. On the other hand, coercive transfer lies on the opposite end of the range, which refers to the imposition of policies on national governments by external actors. Yılmaz (2017) also points out that different models exist to explain policy transfer, and that coercive and voluntary transfer can be thought of as two options at opposite ends of a spectrum, in between different forms of mixed transfer. In this regard, Yılmaz (2017) explains different mixed models ranging from obligated transfer and negotiated transfer to the conditionality and international externalities. Near the conclusion of coercive transfer is obligated transfer, which describes how policies are incorporated into the national framework as a result of a nation's commitments as a participant in particular international regimes and structures. Another kind of mixed transfer is the negotiated transfer, which is the alteration of policy to enable international players to lend loans to the EU or the IMF. Additionally, she also discusses conditionality, which is the use of a system of conditional threats and rewards by an international actor to force countries to transfer specific policies, as well as international externalities like competition or image that may also be important because states might transfer policies to maintain or improve their reputation internationally or to compete internationally (Yılmaz, 2017).

Furthermore, because it is a multifaceted, extensive, and prolonged process rather than an all-or-nothing one, there may be varying degrees of transfer, which Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) categorize into four types (Figure 2.1). The transfer could be managed in the form of “copying” which refers to the direct and complete transfer without any changes or “emulation” which rather includes the transfer of the ideas behind the policy (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). In that case, the transferring agent does not copy in every detail but accepts that this particular policy or program provides the best

standard to implement at home (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). As a third category, the transfer could be realized in the form of "synthesis" which refers to the combination of familiar elements from programs in a number of different places-mostly in two or more countries to create a new and best-suited policy. Finally, under the category of the "inspiration", a policy or program elsewhere may inspire a policy change at home, but the final outcome may not essentially be portrayed on the original one. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), politicians may tend to rely more on copying or emulation due to their search for quick solutions, while bureaucrats would be much more interested in synthesis (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Similarly, Stone (2004) argues that officials could be more engaged in the hard transfer of policy practices and instruments in the process of formal decision-making legislation and regulation, while non-state actors and transnational networks tend to be involved in soft transfer of policy ideas which affect public opinion and policy agendas. On the other hand, Stone (2004) also argues that the degree of transfer is more likely to be superficial especially when there is not sufficient local learning, and policy/program is directly imposed; while it is more likely to appear particularly when the policies are transferred from an actor that is geographically, ideologically and culturally nearby and familiar.

Also, there are institutional and structural elements defined by Dolowitz and March (1996), which may hinder the transfer processes; institutional and structural impediments, ideological incompatibility, political, bureaucratic and economic resources, bureaucratic size and efficiency as well as technological abilities and the complexity of the policy/program itself. Additionally, Evans (2009) defines two sorts of constraints for policy transfer processes: cognitive obstacles and environmental ones. Cognitive obstacles refer to the constrains recognized in the phase of pre-decision such as limited search activity or cultural assimilation; while environmental obstacles refer to the broader institutional, political, economic and social constraints, limited technical support, resources and policy design to the lack of efficient as well as cognitive and elite mobilization strategies and policy transfer networks (Evans, 2009).

Partly due to these constraints and obstacles, the transfer process could be incomplete, when crucial elements of the original policy or structure are not transferred; or

inappropriate when the economic, social, political, and ideological differences among the transferring and borrowing countries are not considered with sufficient attention. In addition to incomplete and inappropriate transfer, there could also be a case of uninformed transfer when the borrowing country does not have sufficient information about the policy or structure and how it operates in the original country (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). On the other hand, according to the Evans (2009), the presence of certain institutional and ideational arrangements such as discourses about globalization, Europeanization and neo-liberalism, activities of global economic institutions and financial markets (e.g. IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organization), international organizations such as the OECD, international treaties such as the GATT and transnational and non-state organizations may increase the possibility of policy transfer to occur (Evans, 2009).

2.2.1 Policy Transfer from the EU

In the previous decades when the nation states were the sole and the most powerful actors of international politics, peer-to-peer transfer between national governments were more prominent. However, in the globalized world and proliferation of actors with multiple scales; policies, ideas and norms are also increasingly transferred through NGOs, think tanks, international and intergovernmental coalitions, and bodies such as OECD and the EU. The growing complexity and ambiguity of the modern governance has increased the possibility of policy transfer activities for policy makers at all levels (Evans, 2009). Today, policy transfer can occur vertically between states and international organizations/transnational non-state actors, in addition to bilateral horizontal transfers between nation states, which puts the understanding of policy transfer beyond the ordinary bilateral relations of importing and exporting to a more multifaceted and multi-centered environment. Actually, it is also possible to take multiple lessons by transferring policies, programs, and structures from more than one actor/organization at the same time (Stone, 2004).

In this sense, policy transfer has an increasing influence on contemporary policies, especially in the European context, due to the close collaboration in multiple policy

fields. Globalization and Europeanization have brought politicians and public servants closer together, and now international organizations and policy entrepreneurs are "selling" policies around the world (Moisio, 2018). According to Radaelli (2000), especially the EU has grown into a platform of transfer to publicize policies in many different areas changing from environment to foreign and energy policies. In that picture, member states are increasingly uploading and downloading policies to/from the EU level (Benson & Jordan, 2011). As cited by Moisio (2018), Radaelli (2000) observes that in this process, the European Commission can be viewed as an active policy entrepreneur, working in tandem with other policy transfer actors like advocacy groups or policy experts. Moreover, Radaelli (2000) is considered to make the case that power plays a major role in policy learning within the EU. This standpoint is supported by the development of indicators, peer reviews, and common guidelines, all of which generate hierarchies of diverse solutions to political issues and put distinct pressures on member states to adjust (Moisio, 2018). Similarly for Stone (2004), the EU acts as an institution promoting the convergence of policies of its member states in many policy areas such as the monetary arrangements and use of the common currency-Euro through surrendering national autonomy but with the awareness of the costs that divergence may create. On the other hand, especially the candidate countries are required to comply with the EU standards before their accession and the European Commission somehow vertically influences candidates for compliance through regulations and directives (Stone, 2004).

Nonetheless, Bulmer and Padgett (2004), cited by Moisio (2018), assert that there has not been much agreement on the true nature of policy transfer in the EU. Different transfer types are produced by the different governance structures found in the EU (Moisio, 2018). Firstly, in hierarchical mode of governance, the EU exercises supranational authority and sort of obliges coercive transfer of policies (as a requirement of memberships) in certain policy areas such as the Single Market (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004). According to Radaelli (2000), even though a certain degree of coercion can be spotted, it is still not the dominant mode of governance in the EU policymaking, which is rather non-hierarchical, due to lack of centralization of the EU policy processes around a key organization. In this regard, member states decided to surrender sovereignty in monetary policy under the Economic and Monetary Union

whose legitimacy was achieved especially after the inflationary crisis of the 1970s (Radaelli, 2000). Börzel and Risse (2011) also propose that the EU barely applies coercion in its external relations; rather, coercion is the mechanism for the member states when they are required to comply with particular types of EU law and to a lesser extent for the candidate countries. On the other hand, the EU often uses conditionality, positive and negative incentives (e.g., rewards in the form of financial and technical assistance or incentives for political actors like electoral support) to manipulate cost-benefit calculations and persuasion especially in accession countries, neighbors and other regions of the world (Börzel & Risse, 2011).

The EU also uses “the qualified majority vote” method to enact common regulations and standards, which form the basis of a yet another system-negotiated governance which is extremely prevalent within the EU. Negotiations are used in the European Union to reach agreements in a variety of settings, from legally binding regulations to informal understandings. This kind of governance, which Bulmer and Padgett (2004) are cited to refer to as a "negotiated order," typically develops when ideas or models of policy from one or more member states are incorporated into the EU standards (Moisio, 2018). Through the above-mentioned governance method, the EU establishes common norms and rules via negotiations and common consent. This kind of transfer through negotiation was the predominant mode of governance in the environmental legislation, in which policy models and ideas offered by the policy leaders have been influential in the formulation of the EU agenda (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004).

A final type of governance structure in the EU is named as voluntary transfer or facilitated unilateralism/coordination, where the member states retain their competence, but still coordinate the policy via EU’s institutional settings (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004). Facilitated coordination, which has been re-discovered with the Lisbon agenda and the following Open Method of Coordination (OMC), operates like a platform for discussion, benchmarking exercises, policy transfer, learning from each other, socialization and diffusion of good practices (Radaelli, 2004). Studies on transfer of policies from the EU level mostly focus on its voluntary mode of governance and OMC, which refers to a learning and transfer process based on persuasion, soft incentives of guidelines, benchmarks and targets and non-hierarchical

horizontal exchange rather than hard obligations (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004). The EU encourages competition and lesson-drawing among countries and actors who compete with each other for the best practices and uses the mechanisms like OMC especially in the policy areas, where the EU is unable to assert top-down competences (e.g. in the field of higher education or employment) to foster convergence via benchmarks and regular peer-reviews (Börzel & Risse, 2011). Because OMC is directly related to the primary subject of this research, we need to pay close attention to it.

As formally initiated by the European Council in Lisbon (2000), OMC is an EU policy-making process or a method of soft governance which aims to achieve convergence through spreading best practices and establishing guidelines, qualitative and quantitative indicators, benchmarks, national and regional targets followed by periodic evaluations (such as in the case of Erasmus+ programs) and peer reviews (Prpic, 2014). In his study, Radaelli (2003) asks the question of *"can the EU affect national policy even in the absence of EU directives and regulations?"* For him, the answer lies in particular governance mechanisms of the EU such as the OMC which aims policy congruence or convergence in policy outcomes by spreading best practices and policy transfer platforms rather than law making systems (Radaelli, 2003). Indirect effects and mechanisms of the EU reach beyond the member states; while the legal obligation and compliance with the acquis communautaire is restrained for the EU member countries in principle, other indirect mechanisms such as learning can go beyond its territory and affect the non-members (Haverland, 2005). For instance, the legal framework of the Bologna Process is not binding, and they are mostly nothing more than declarations and intentions of signatory states. Still, the Bologna Process is commonly acknowledged as the most influential impetus for change in the field of higher education since 1999, mostly due to its mechanisms of soft law and OMC which foresee socialization, imitation and shame, being maybe even more powerful than coercion (Ravinet, 2008). In this regard, the European Commission which does not have an explicit and coercive authority in the field of higher education still publishes annual evaluation reports about the performance of the countries in terms of their progress and performance in Erasmus, Tempus, Bologna etc. practices and, in a way, encourages competition to get the best scores, shaming for the bad results and aims to spread best practices via these reviews.

According to Kerber and Eckardt (2005), the OMC can be viewed as a two-level policy learning procedure, in theory. The best national policies ought to be determined by comparing and assessing the efficacy of the centrally implemented policies in the member states, and then disseminated through policy recommendations. Common goals are agreed upon by the EU Council using benchmarks and indicators that are primarily created by the Commission. The member state agrees that they would routinely report on their progress toward achieving their goals as well as the policies they have planned and put into place. The Commission evaluates their efforts, pinpoints best practices, and creates suggestions for every state in the Union. The outcomes are outlined in a joint report that requires European Council approval. The member states carry out the recommendations made to them during the follow-up phase. Therefore, by participating in the formulation of shared issues, goals, and possible solutions, the Commission may have an impact on the direction of upcoming regulations in the member states (Kerber & Eckardt, 2005).

When we concentrate on policy transfer from the EU with specific regard to the higher education, it might be argued that since the EU only sets standards and common goals for the member states to meet, it does not have any mandatory legal enforcement in the field of education and instead prefers to use the exchange of best practices as a means of policy transfer. This relationship between national policy formation for higher education and higher education discussions at the EU level was analyzed by Moiso (2018) in advance. Moisio (2018) cited that Lange and Alexiadou (2010) distinguished between different policy learning styles in education policy by classifying various interactions between member states, the European Commission, and other member states. These interactions were divided into four categories: surface policy learning, competitive policy learning, mutual learning, and imperialistic policy learning. According to the theory of mutual learning, qualitative information about various practices is just as significant as quantitative data (Moisio, 2018). Mutual learning is voluntary, and participating nations are encouraged to take part when the lessons learned from these experiences could aid in the resolution of domestic policy issues. Competitive policy learning is a concept that emphasizes cooperation's quantitative aspects more. Several EU organizations, including the European Training Foundation, Cedefop, and Eurostat, create statistical analyses of educational practices

within the EU. Competitive learning begins with particular presumptions, benchmarks, or indicators, and discussions are restricted to the problems that have been chosen. International comparisons are the aim of competitive learning, while mutual learning aims to teach deeply about politics and traditions (Moisio, 2018). The pressure put on member states is what drives competitive learning. Pressure works best when combined with media attention, because states have an incentive to maintain their positive image. Compared to mutual learning, competitive learning is less of a bottom-up process, because statistics are primarily produced by formal institutions (Moisio, 2018). The term "imperialist policy learning" describes both the European Commission's policy agenda and the attempt by certain nations to export their national education policies to other nations. On the other hand, surface policy learning describes a member state's attempt to minimize the influence of the Commission or other member states by taking a more passive or negative stance (Moisio, 2018).

As a concluding remark for policy transfer and policy transfer from the EU, it is worth stating that the EU has now emerged as a significant player in the transfer of policies pertaining to higher education. In this context, the frameworks of policy transfer and Europeanization are very intertwined. An important framework to analyze policy transfers from the EU and its impact on national policy-making is provided by the Europeanization literature. Some authors even claim that “policy transfer [is] sometimes considered to be yet another form of Europeanization” (Vukasovic, 2012). Therefore, the following section will cover Europeanization literature in a greater detail as the second theoretical pillar of this study.

2.3 Europeanization

The classical theories of European integration, namely neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism served as the foundation for the Europeanization debate. With the EU increasingly taking on a more complex structure, new theoretical efforts were required to elaborate on the various dynamics and dimensions of the integration. Although, it took some time for Europeanization to be acknowledged in the EU studies as a separate field of study, there are now opportunities for new research aiming to

grasp how changes in national political systems are influenced by the European integration, thanks to the shift in focus to understand how states have institutionalized their adaptation to the EU membership. In an effort to go beyond the traditional integration theories, a new research agenda known as "Europeanization" has emerged, which also resembles a *"shift from grand theories to meso theories".* This agenda focuses on how member states administratively adapted to the EU membership and how the EU membership altered the organizational logic of national politics and policymaking (Karadağ, 2019).

Since the late 1990s, concept and theory of the Europeanization has been analyzed by a variety of theoretical approaches, disciplines, and authors. Europeanization literature has explored the impact of the EU on domestic policies, processes and institutions of the member states (e.g. Goetz & Hitz, 2000; Caporaso, Green, Cowles et al., 2001; Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002; Bulmer & Leguesne, 2003; Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003 etc.) as well as accession countries (e.g. Schimmelfenning, 2010; Börzel & Soyaltın-Colella, 2012; Yılmaz & Soyaltın, 2014 etc.), particularly the Eastern Neighborhood (Börzel, 2011; Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier, 2019; Soso, 2021 etc.). Since the late 1990s and the early 2000s, studies about the influence of the EU on the policies, institutions and practices of its member states have increased significantly.

It is clear that Brussels-induced policy making is affecting more and more policy areas, considering that the EU generates approximately 500 policy decisions and more than 5000 Directives and Regulations every year (Börzel & Risse, 2000). Hence, the question is no more whether Europe matters in domestic policy making, but how does it matter and to what degree (Börzel & Risse, 2000). Moreover, since the EU's influence has been expanding beyond the member states, analysis of the Europeanization is no longer restricted in explaining domestic changes of official member states; rather it is also used to explain domestic changes in the candidate and neighbor countries, which creates more concerns about the explanatory power and applicability of the Europeanization approaches (Bauer et al., 2007). Especially since the 1990s, scholars have begun to study the effects of European governance beyond the official borders of the EU and on external actors, mostly with the impact of the expansion of its Single Market as well as a series of enlargement rounds, especially

the Eastern enlargement, bigger and transformative than the previous enlargements. Additionally, the EU has developed institutional arrangements and partnerships with the third countries who are not eligible or willing for membership (e.g. European Economic Area, European Neighborhood Policy etc.) to align them with the EU policies and rules (Schimmelfenning, 2010).

Because the EU-implemented domestic changes may have changing effects on various policy fields, it is important to consider not only geographical dissimilarities but also different policy areas when analyzing them. Analyzing the Europeanization process in areas where the EU has exclusive jurisdiction and implements hard law, like monetary policy and competition policy, is comparatively well-established. However, it is more complex and difficult to study the Europeanization process and role of the EU in the policy areas in which only non-binding policy instruments exist, such as the higher education, which is shaped at the member state level mostly, but still influenced by the European rules and regulations (Spanke, 2017). For instance, foundation of new state units and ministries with the purpose of coordinating the EU regulations and directives could be easily linked to the influence of the EU. However, it is more difficult to trace the impact of the EU on the harmonization of domestic policies with the European framework, which may not automatically result from the EU influence (Haverland, 2005).

Furthermore, while assessing the literature, it is crucial to keep in mind that the concept of Europeanization is not free from criticisms. In terms of the policy areas, the case selection with regards to the Europeanization studies is criticized in the sense that the cases are typically selected, meaning that large number of the studies select the cases in which the EU competencies, pressures, incentives and ideas exist potentially and this creates a problem in terms of the variation (Haverland, 2005). In order to address this variation problem, Haverland (2005) offers to compare the EU member states where the EU impact is present with the non-members or control group in which the EU stimulus is absent. If the researcher would see a considerable variation in the results between the EU member states and the non-members, this difference may not be triggered by the EU-related factors, but rather a bunch of variables such as socio-economic development, nature of the political systems and so on. If the author focuses

on the EU member states only, as another strategy to increase the variation, Haverland (2005) proposes to involve policy areas in which the EU factors do not exist. In that regard, the first systematic cross-national studies (Lehmkuhl 1996, Knil 1998, Knill and Lenschow 1998, Börzel 1999) were conducted in the late 1990s to understand the impact of European integration on domestic structures and policies (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999). For instance, Caporaso and Jupille (1999) analyzed the domestic impact of positive integration in the field of social policy, while Eichener (1996) studied its impact on the area of health and safety at work. Similarly, Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999) analyzed different types and mechanisms of European policy making in the areas of environmental policy, road haulage policy and railways policy. In the following years, Sciarini, Fischer and Nicolet (2004) conducted a comparative analysis between the free movement of people, a policy area under the direct EU competence and telecommunications reforms, a sector subject to indirect pressure, and pension reform wherein there is hardly any EU pressure (Haverland, 2005).

All in all, Europeanization which emerged out of classical theories of European integration in the late 1990s has been studied from different theoretical stances, authors and academic fields through an examination of the EU influence on the domestic policies and processes of the member states as well as the accession countries. However, as the next sections explain, the Europeanization literature is ever developing, and it also has some limits which also requires a cautious elaboration.

2.3.1 Definition: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Research Designs

According to Ladrech (1994), the term "Europeanization" refers to "an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that the European Commission political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making". Similarly, Börzel (1999) defines Europeanization as "a process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making", while Bulmer and Burch quoted in Wach (2001) describe the concept as "a set of processes through which political, social and economic dynamics of the EU displays interactions with the logics of national

discourse, national identity, domestic political structures and domestic public politicians" (Wach, 2015).

As the aforementioned definitions show, initial explanations of Europeanization tended to track a top-down standpoint, trying to describe internal responses because of pressures from above; that is, downloading EU directives, regulations, and institutional structures to the domestic level. This is evident, even though Ladrech asserts a more bottom-up perception about Europeanization by emphasizing the role of domestic actors, as it is also evident in Börzel and Risse's definition. With the advancement of Europeanization studies however, the emphasis started to change (Karadağ, 2019). In this regard, Radaelli's (2004) definition of Europeanization is a significant literary development:

> "Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, political structures and public policies (Radaelli, 2004)."

According to Exadaktylos and Radaelli (2009), prior research has focused more on discussing research design issues at a fairly general level or discussing outcomes, such as whether country A is Europeanized or not. As a result of their investigation of the literature through a review of the causality debate, Exadaktylos and Radaelli (2009) claim that the awareness of research design is still low in the Europeanization literature. Moreover, they emphasize that, in accordance with Radaelli's proposal, viewing Europeanization as a process rather than a final product shows the significance of process tracing; this definition has been applied to the discussion of two empirical research design categories, referred to as top-down and bottom-up (Exadaktylos & Radaelli, 2009). Figure 2.2 below illustrates the top-down (downloading) and bottom-up (uploading) approaches as well as the circular approach (crossloading), which combine two previously popular research approaches and assume mutual linking of these processes.

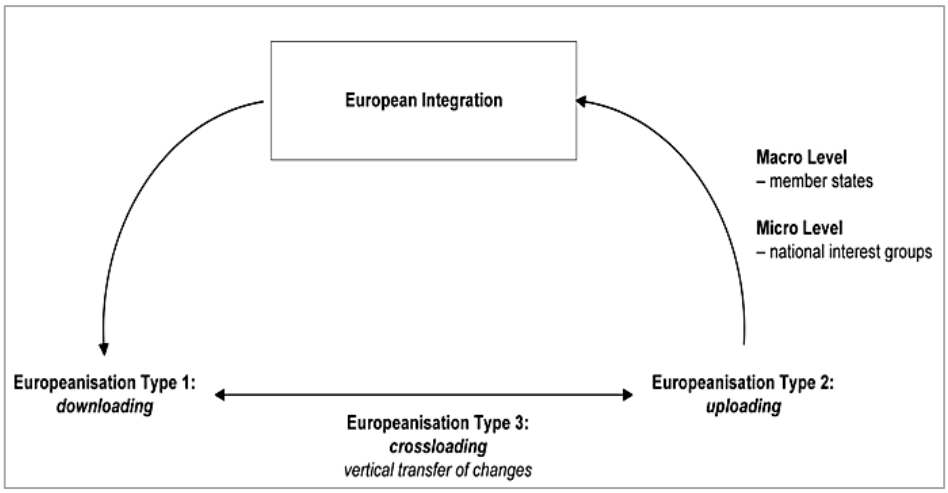


Figure 2.2 Europeanization Processes as the Mechanisms of European Integration.

Source: Wach, K. (2015). Conceptualizing Europeanization: Theoretical Approaches and Research Designs. In P. Stanek, & K. Wach, *Europeanization Process from the Mesoeconomic Perspective: Industrial and Policies* (pp.11-23). Krakow: Cracow University of Economics.

While the bottom-up approach assumes that member states would influence or shape the EU policies and the institutional setting for their advantage; top-down process refers to the domestic changes and adaptations triggered and supported by the EU itself only (Spanke, 2017). The top-down approach to Europeanization which was mostly studied by several authors such as Risse (2001), Börzel (2000, 2005), Caporaso (2007) etc. tends to rely on the direct pressures from the EU on the member states and their reactions, which were assumed to lead to changes at the domestic level (Radaelli, 2004). In this perspective, the focus is on the misfit or mismatch between the European and domestic policies, processes and institutions, which in turn creates adaptational and the EU-level pressures for domestic change (Hang, 2011). Top-down approaches have been increasingly criticized due to prejudging the EU as the key basis of domestic change by stating that the EU is not the only cause of regional and domestic institutional change, even for the candidate countries, for whom direct institutional change is required by the EU accession (Börzel & Risse, 2011).

However, Radaelli's definition (2004) refers to a more interactive and complex process than a top-down, uni-directional reaction to European Union. Unlike the top-

down approach, the starting point in the bottom-up perspective is the actors, problems, discourses, and interactions at the domestic level (Radaelli, 2004), particularly in the cases where binding EU legislation does not exist. In this regard, Radaelli proposes to seek domestic policy events and institutional and individual choices of the domestic systems and his definition has been used mostly for explaining the domestic changes in the policy areas, where the EU does not have hard law instruments (Göksel, 2011). The quotation of Radaelli (2004) is presented below.

> "Europeanisation should be rather understood as a) governance which refers to a changing understanding of governance in a complex set of layers via private and public actors; b) institutionalization in which formal rules and ways of doing are first identified and institutionalized in the EU context and c) discourse through which policy makers construct the idea of Europe, change the preferences of local actors, convey meanings and communicate the policies to the public".

From the top-down perspective, European level policy is the independent variable affecting domestic policies, processes and institutions and Europeanization is often understood as the EU pressure on the governments, public administrations, and civil societies at the domestic level. Within this understanding, there seems to be an EU pressure on the one side and member states who surrender their autonomy for change, on the other. Yet, power dynamics and relationships are more complex than this zero-sum game, particularly in the multi-centered framework of the today's world. Not only is there pressure from the EU, but domestic actors may also use European rhetoric to strengthen their position locally, advance their own agenda, and give legitimacy to choices and tactics they have already made (Saurugger & Radaelli, 2008). In that sense, a bottom-up analysis starts from the domestic level.

In top-down models such as the one proposed by Caporaso (2007), empirical research begins with the presence of integration, regulates the degree to which EU-level policies create fit or misfit in the member states, and then explains whether or not domestic change occurs. There are no exogenous variables in the model because it is recursive. On the other hand, the actors, concepts, issues, regulations, styles, and results at the national level at time zero are the starting point for the bottom-up research design, as proposed by Radaelli (2004). After that, it processes—traces the system over time and pinpoints the pivotal moments or turning points, such as when a significant ideational

shift occurs, or the group of dominant actors is modified. The researcher ascends-controls temporal casual sequences from the domestic level, where the major change emerges empirically, to the EU. At every point, the critical question arises: was this significant change driven by domestic factors, or was it influence by external variables, such as those at the EU level? (Exadaktylos & Radaelli, 2009).

Bandow and Kolman (2018) also state that the majority of research on Europeanization in literature is still done by using a top-down methodology. There are several reasons, but the methodological simplicity it offers is stated to be the primary one. Nonetheless, the research design that views Europeanization as a one-dimensional, one-way influence from the EU level to the domestic level and places the influence of the EU as an independent, domestic impact as a dependent variable may be overly simplistic. The impact and interactions of domestic actors are disregarded by the top-down approaches. Its implicit premise—that Europeanization can only take place if one harmonizes with EU practices—is yet another problem. As Radaelli (2000) shows, divergence, inertia, and retreat all contribute to the process of Europeanization (Bandow & Kolman, 2018).

In the same vein, one could argue that Europeanization is an "explanans", or explanatory variable, explaining, influencing, and affecting other phenomena. Nonetheless, Europeanization can also serve as an "explanandum", or a variable that is explained by other factors. Europeanization, as an explanandum, is viewed as an effect and the other factors are the causes in a cause-and-effect relationship; however, as an explanans, it is the cause itself and the effects are what it explains in the research. Hence, the way that a research study positions Europeanization in the cause-and-effect relationship—as an explanans or an explanandum, for example—is one of the factors that essentially defines the study (Grünhut, 2017).

With this regard, the Europeanization concept is considered as an independent and explanatory variable in top-down research designs. Top-down definitions of Europeanization have one thing in common: they all see the pressure to change at the EU level as a prerequisite to Europeanization. On the other hand, Europeanization is a process that should be explained (rather than an independent variable) in the bottom-

up research design, which focuses on the actors' perspectives, interests, and the values and norms that frame their interactions and actions. As opposed to beginning and ending at the level of EU policies, the bottom-up approach tracks the impact of these interactions on domestic actors and policies. Prior to the start of the EU pressure, the domestic level is analyzed, and the country's involvement in EU negotiations is then monitored (Bandow & Kolman, 2018).

Put another way, the objective of top-down logic is to ascertain the domestic consequences of independent variables that are established at the EU level; the primary difficulty faced by domestic policy makers is the implementation of European policy. The bottom-up method, on the other hand, uses chronological sequences to show the timing, precedence, and speed of significant decisions. Bottom-up approach, being an actor-centered approach, does not artificially divide domestic decisions as implementation from the EU activity as policy (Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004). From this perspective, for instance, Schmidt and Radaelli proposes that examining what happens at the level of policy makers at the center of national and subnational policy conundrums is a more effective method of determining whether the OMC has had an impact on domestic policy than tracing best practices from Brussels to domestic contexts (Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004).

That is to say, domestic change is typically explained by the concept of Europeanization when examining the reform processes in candidate countries. According to a traditional top-down perspective, the term "Europeanization" primarily refers to domestic reactions to adaptational forces originating from the European Union. The main focus is on how the EU's one-way influence on a candidate's domestic politics during the EU accession and rule-transfer processes affects them. In that regard, the top-down strategy frequently overemphasizes how much the EU and membership conditions affect a candidate's domestic politics. This increases the propensity to ignore other theories that could explain changes within a country. Yet, numerous internal or external factors, many of which may or may not be connected to the adaptational pressures arising from the EU accession process, can also stimulate domestic change. Adaptational pressure may not only come from the EU, but also other organizations and actors as well as the international competition. Additionally,

the extent to which the EU has an impact on a candidate's chances of becoming a member may change over time depending on tectonic dynamics, elections, financial or political crises, increased domestic pressure for change, or inertia. Therefore, a comprehensive grasp of domestic dynamics is necessary for the evaluation of external impact (Özdemir, 2014).

This is being said, starting with the domestic interaction system, the bottom-up approach concentrates on domestic outcomes, including institutionalization, implementation, legislative reforms, setbacks, and resistance, as well as the confluence of internal and external dynamics at a given time. Subsequently, research tracks the path of change (process tracing) and determines the chronological sequence of critical junctures that signify the main turning points in the development of the domestic system. The bottom-up approach examines the domestic system of interaction for each temporal sequence, determining whether and how the EU generates change. As an example from this angle, Özdemir's (2014) research sees the new domestic opportunity structure that arises from the EU accession process and the conditions associated with EU membership as secondary rather than primary causes of domestic change; the article's main objective is to avoid making assumptions about the EU's influence, while simultaneously not ignoring other potential internal and external actors and variables.

Özdemir (2014) utilizes the methodological tools of the bottom-up research approach—such as process tracing, analysis of complex and multiple causality, and a focus on domestic interaction dynamics—to examine Türkiye's legislative reforms on combating violence against women (VAW), paying particular attention to the EU's role and influence in driving the reform process. She traces the evolution of violence against women from 1999 to 2005 and comes to the conclusion that while the EU had a significant impact, it was not the only factor in the new civil and penal code's adoption, which included provisions pertaining to VAWs (Özdemir, 2014). The EU's influence was evident in the timing of the civil code and penal code, but these laws were based on pre-existing elements such as the domestic women's movement and the international CEDAW process; the EU's influence blended in seamlessly with these elements. As a result, she argues that domestic dynamics determine the EU's level of influence and that the EU stimulus should be viewed as a supporting rather than the

primary factor in the state authorities' decision to carry out the necessary reforms (Özdemir, 2014).

Similarly, Trenz (2011), who looked at how the EU affects domestic opportunities for civil society organizations at the member state level or offers additional opportunities to mobilize at the supranational level, also claims that most analyses that place civil society inside the framework of EU governance consequently see Europeanization as a hierarchical and top-down process of transformation. According to Trenz (2011), the EU, which funds gender policy, is ultimately responsible for advancing women's rights in the newly admitted member states. However, the impact of civil society organizations is subject to pre-established agendas and is restricted to regulatory areas within the clearly defined competence of the EU (Trenz, 2011).

This is being said, with a bottom-up research design, the question is not how the EU forces change, but rather how domestic actors use the EU as a draw to transform unfavorable domestic opportunity structures, raise public concerns, and develop their own capabilities. The bottom-up approach to Europeanization has the advantage of demonstrating how national agendas can be reframed by drawing inspiration from the EU. Instead of directly influencing political decisions, Europeanization modifies behaviors and attitudes from the bottom up. Therefore, domestic actors' shifting their attitudes and perspectives is as equally significant as their strategic adaptation to new opportunities structures that the EU has created (Trenz, 2011).

It is important to highlight that much of the literature on the domestic effects of Europeanization tends to focus on examining the outcomes of domestic changes in terms of policy and institutional convergence among member states. However, empirical measurement of convergence is quite difficult because convergence at the macro level may still have a substantial degree of discrepancy at the micro-level, as in the case of Economic and Monetary Union, which did not cause same institutional provisions at member states despite the policy convergence in inflation and budgetary restraints (Börzel & Risse, 2003). In none of the empirical case studies, convergence refers to complete homogenization of domestic structures throughout member states; rather most of the instances show a mixed result in which some states converged

towards similar policies or structures while others preserved their institutional arrangements, relations and cultural understandings (Börzel & Risse, 2003). Additionally, although the EU requires convergence in policy outcomes in terms of rules and regulations, member states keep power and autonomy in terms of the means to ensure compliance. Hence, one needs to be more specific about what is meant by convergence; convergence in outcome or convergence in policy processes and instruments (Börzel & Risse, 2003).

In that sense, it is critical to underline that Europeanization does not automatically mean convergence, even in the hierarchical modes of governance of the EU. Especially the top-down approach tends to see the EU as the main source of domestic change and relies on the hierarchical role of the EU in which it legally imposes its policies and member states comply with them. However, usually domestic changes do not automatically occur as a result of Europeanization; but they might also result from the influences of other variables such as globalization and domestic politics. Even in the case of the candidate countries in which direct institutional alteration is required by the EU accession, the EU is not the only source for regional and domestic institutional change (Börzel & Risse, 2011). It is specifically difficult to measure the impact of soft law, learning and peer pressure and to understand whether or not the domestic changes are triggered by rather concrete internal processes and pressures (Radaelli, 2004).

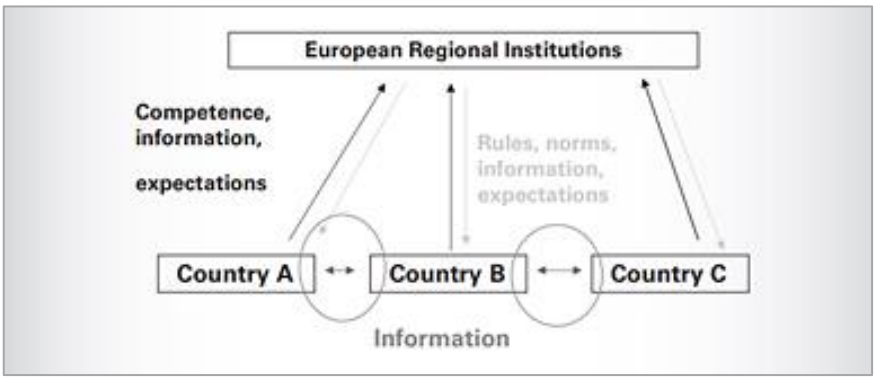


Figure 2.3 Europeanization: More Than a Two-Way Process.

Source: Graziano, P. & Vink, M.P. (2013). Europeanization: Concept, Theory and Methods. In S. Bumer, & C. Lesquene, *The Member States of the European Union* (pp.31-54). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Additionally, as indicated in the Figure 2.3, Europeanization does not only entail vertical top-down processes, but is also composed of horizontal processes which refer to policy learning and diffusion in the sense of cross-border contacts and exchange of information and expertise among different actors, civil servants, lobbies, entrepreneurs and so on in an integrated Europe (Graziano & Vink , 2013). The EU provides a platform for inter-state communication and/or competition; such horizontal transfers and learning processes might still pressurize the national actors, even there is not direct involvement or coercion of the EU (Hang, 2011).

2.3.2 Mechanisms of the Europeanization

Europeanization literature stands on different analytical starting points; for instance, most of the studies accept the misfit between domestic and European policies, instruments, and structures as a key for domestic change (Bauer et al., 2007). According to Börzel and Risse (2003), for the EU-induced domestic change to occur, there must be some degree of misfit or incompatibility between domestic level policies, institutions and processes and the European ones, which in turn leads to adaptational pressures. Börzel and Risse define (2003) two types of misfits through which European level exerts adaptational pressure on the member states; policy misfit among the European rules and regulations and the domestic policy goals, standards, regulations, and instruments on the one hand and institutional misfit which also refers to the collective understanding attached to domestic rules and procedures, on the other. They even claim that if Europeanization fits perfectly well with the domestic processes and European rules, norms and understandings are already highly compatible with the domestic ones; there is no need for domestic change, since a problem of compliance does not occur (Börzel & Risse, 2003).

That being said, in order to describe the varying forms of institutional adjustments across countries and policy sectors, different mechanisms and mediating factors should be taken into account (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999). Since there is not a single mode of EU governance, the Europeanisation mechanisms are also differential; the governance methods of the EU and its Europeanisation mechanisms are intertwined.

Different mechanisms of the Europeanization are rooted back to Knill and Lehmkuhl's (1999 & 2002) study. They distinguish three ideal types of European policy-making (namely positive integration, negative integration and framing integration) which are characterized by distinct Europeanization mechanisms and claim that rather than the nominal category of the policy area, specific mechanism is the most significant factor to be taken into account while exploring domestic effect of variable European policies (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999). The first type of European policy-making is called as "positive integration or institutional compliance" which refers to the EU-induced policy changes through institutional requirements and compatibility and the EU-offered institutional models for domestic arrangements to be adjusted (e.g. the most well-known study for this approach is Risse, Cowles and Caporaso-2001). In this form of Europeanization, domestic changes may be triggered by the European policy making through positively proposing tangible institutional requirements and models that member states must obey and adjust their domestic arrangements accordingly (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999). This mechanism employs rather a top-down approach, and it exemplifies the coercive way of Europeanization (Göksel, 2011)

There are basically two explanations for the case of positive integration. The first one is goodness of fit between domestic structures, national institutional settings, rules and practices and the ones offered by the EU which results in adaptational pressures. The second one is mediating factors to explain whether the current misfit results in a significant change in the country and why certain states converge towards similar policies and institutions, while other do not.

Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001) suggest a three-step explanation for "goodness of fit"; first, related European processes, rules, regulations, institutions, and practices which might be adjusted to the domestic level are identified. Secondly, the goodness of fit or non-compliance between the domestic policies, institutional settings, rules and practices and the European processes are specified, whose degree determines the adaptational pressures. If the fit between the domestic structures and European institutions is higher, less adaptational pressure for domestic change is likely (Göksel, 2011). Börzel and Risse (2000) also indicate that there are two conditions for Europeanization-induced domestic change; there must be a misfit or incompatibility

among the domestic institutions and policies and the European processes as well as facilitating factors (either actors or institutions) answering the adaptational pressures (Börzel & Risse, 2000). As a second explanation for positive integration model, the presence of domestic structural and actor-focused mediating factors are emphasized, such as multiple veto points, facilitating institutions and cooperative cultures. In other words, according to Börzel and Risse (2000), misfit between European and domestic policies, processes and institutions is a must, but whether it produces a substantial change at the domestic level depends on some other facilitating and mediating factors, which will be explained in the following parts of this chapter.

In that regard, governance by compliance, which typically appears in the policies of positive integration, refers to the legally binding rules and constraints that the member states have to follow. For member states and candidate countries, this precondition is the adaptation of the EU acquis communautaire, which is a condition for EU membership and the candidate countries are required to adopt exiting EU laws and norms as a legal obligation. For those states who do not have a membership perspective in the near future, the EU that does not have a legal claim to impose regulations and institutional models is not capable of using conditionality as a coercive tool. Hence, compliance-driven EU policies are expected not to create an effect on domestic change in the third countries unless they voluntarily decide to comply with the restrictive EU measures. Moreover, despite countries' great efforts to adopt EU laws and norms at the beginning of their candidate status, this process might be weakened or resisted as soon as the membership status of the relevant country became clear and especially if the adjustment costs are high. Hence, credible membership perspective, the benefits expected from membership as well as the candidate countries' response to EU compliance measures are all crucial (Bauer et al., 2007).

The concepts of misfit and conditionality have been mostly studied in the analyses of accession and neighboring countries. For the Europeanization through enlargement, it has been claimed that the EU-induced domestic change is likely to occur, if there is a combination of high misfit (policy and institutional) and credible conditionality (Yılmaz & Soyaltın, 2014). Yılmaz and Soyaltın (2014), who analyzed the Europeanization of Türkiye in the policy fields of fight against corruption and minority

rights (with high misfit and substantial costs) offered that although the credibility of the EU conditionality and membership process dropped after 2005 in Türkiye, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government continued to adopt and amend a number of legal rules in these areas, even though they were selective and incomplete. Hence, in the absence of credible and strong EU conditionality, the AKP government's preferences and strategic calculations seem to be the main determinant of the continuing reforms. According to Yılmaz and Soyaltın (2014), the puzzling case of Türkiye determines the limits of the EU conditionality approach, and it necessitates a different and bottom-up perspective driven by domestic actors. Their study suggests that the compatibility of the government preferences with the EU-induced domestic reforms determines the domestic change; as the AKP government continued to use European narrative in regard to the fight against corruption and minority rights, to gain and maximize their electoral support.

As another example of the EU conditionality and misfit, according to Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier (2020) on the External Incentive Model, the most effective instrument of Europeanization is the conditionality through which the EU establishes certain rules and norms that the countries need to adopt to be rewarded. These rewards might be ranging from membership to financial and technical assistance and market access. In this framework, Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier (2020) compare the pre-accession and post-accession Europeanization phases of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as well as pre-accession phase of the Southeast Europe (SEE) candidates in Western Balkans and Türkiye, with the purpose of understanding the limitation of the EU's Europeanization through conditionality. They explain that the EU offers rewards and sanctions to affect cost-benefit analyses of the governments, but under what conditions these calculations might make governments to adopt the EU rules in domestic policies is critical, because this process is also determined by the size of the EU rewards, credibility of the conditionality, determinacy of the conditions and the volume of the adjustment costs. Credibility of the incentives is essential in explaining the success of pre-accession Europeanization of the CEE countries. Their studies conclude that the size of the EU rewards and the credibility of the threat for the cancelation of the EU membership declined in the CEE post-accession phase, compared to its pre-accession period (Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier, 2020). On the

other hand, domestic adoption costs and the credibility of the membership reward are differential, when the pre-accession phases of both regions are considered; pre-accession conditionality in SEE was less credible. It is argued that during the pre-accession phase of the CEE countries, rewards were high and credible and domestic adoption costs were lower. While the membership perspective was uncertain, so the credibility and the EU's commitment for membership was lower and adoption costs were higher in SEE countries. Moreover, for the pre-accession phase of the SEE countries, the EU's conditionality was more determinate and demanding, especially in terms of democracy and the rule of law (Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier, 2020). Hence, there might be different contexts, incentives, rewards, and sanctions applied to diverse country groups and actors differently; in other words, Europeanization is not linear.

Consequently, despite it has explanatory power under certain circumstances and for some policy areas, goodness of fit approach is criticized due to its assumption of clear and vertical command chain from the EU to the member states and the EU governance's being more complex in reality. Goodness of fit which may be meaningful where the hard law prevails and the EU offers a clear model for domestic systems, but it is not the only Europeanization mechanism, and it needs to be improved with additional variables. Especially for policy areas where the soft law (such as OMC) prevails, adopting new approaches is required (Göksel, 2011).

The second mechanism employed in EU policymaking is referred to as "negative integration" (e.g., Taylor, 1983), which describes how European policies reshape domestic opportunity structures, redistribute power and resources among domestic actors, and disrupt existing balances. In this framework, domestic adaptation is explained from more actor-based perspective and strategic interaction (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999).

Lastly, "framing integration" (e.g. Ingram & Schneider 1990, Knill & Lehmkuhl 2000) refers to the alteration of cognitive input through Europeanization. Framing integration suggests the EU-induced cognitive convergence rather than direct coercion mechanisms and it refers to the European policies which even more indirectly affect

domestic arrangements by changing the beliefs and expectations of domestic actors, rather than directly effecting institutional structures. Alteration of beliefs and expectations may in turn affect the strategies and preferences of domestic actors and institutional adaptations. In this type of mechanism, the EU offers common reference frameworks, common solutions with the help of socialization, ideational convergence, and learning. Framing integration policies are proposed to alter the domestic political environment by encouraging and consolidating the overall support for wider European reform goals (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 1999).

Essentially, framing integration is about the horizontal mechanisms through which the EU does not have direct pressure for adaptation or the policy areas where the EU itself does not propose a model and has limited coercion. Rather than adaptational pressure coming from the EU models, framing integration utilizes horizontal mechanisms such as OMC which offers a mutual learning process via periodic evaluations, performance indicators, monitoring, peer-reviews, benchmarking, national action plans, guidelines and so on. In that regard, framing integration refers to the domestic change generated by the market and the choices of the actors who are affected through socialization/diffusion of ideas, discourses, and best practice. Unlike hard law instruments such as directives and decisions, minimalist directives or non-compulsory regulations of the EU can still offer further legitimacy and justification for the domestic actors despite the lack of pressure or goodness of fit. However, framing mechanism is also being criticized due to the difficulty of tracing the casual link between policy change and learning, cognitive convergence empirically. Partly due to this reason, the case studies with a theoretical focus of framing Europeanization mechanisms and bottom-up research design have been rather less in number (Göksel, 2011).

2.3.3 Mediating / Intervening Factors

In any of the Europeanization mechanisms, a combination of mediating or intervening factors plays a central role in order to describe the variation in the extent of the EU-induced domestic change (Göksel, 2011). As explained, it is not possible to reduce the

Europeanization to the top-down approach and goodness of fit as its only mechanism; rather, it is only one of the methods of describing the domestic policy change due to the existence of hard law. However, whether the existing misfit leads to a substantial domestic change or not depends on the existence of additional factors which may facilitate the adaption or serve as catalysts for domestic change (Börzel & Risse, 2003).

For instance, Haverland (1999) who analyzed the implementation of Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK claimed that although the gaps in the goodness of fit are important as a major cause of opposition; institutional veto points that governments have to face when imposing European provisions are also particularly important. Similarly, Kallestrup (2006) who examined the domestic regulatory policies of consumer protection and competition policy in Denmark suggested that although goodness of fit holds explanatory value, Europeanization via changing domestic opportunity structures and framing beliefs and expectations is being more salient than goodness of fit when assessing its impacts on national regulatory policy. Consequently, domestic influence of Europe varies unevenly throughout countries and policy areas, meaning that European policy may create fundamental reforms in one country, but may not affect all others. Similarly, as exemplified by Caporaso et al. (2001), Heritier et al. (2001) and Knill and Lenschow (1998), one state may establish regulatory adjustments to some European policies in a specific policy area, while it may not take any action in other areas of Europeanization (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002). Hence, additional mediating variables are required for the better explanatory power of the Europeanization conceptual framework.

For these mechanisms of Europeanization, mediating factors occupy a vital place to describe the distinctions of the EU-induced domestic changes. Not only adaptational pressure but also mediating factors might promote or constrain domestic change. Each state has different institutional structures and actors as well as varying degree of misfit between Europe and domestic processes, which means that facilitating factors are critical in explaining why some member states converge toward similar polices or institutions, but others do not (Börzel & Risse, 2000).

These mediating factors stem differently from two analytically different approaches, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. However, before moving on, it is noteworthy to mention that these approaches are not mutually exclusive, and they frequently happen simultaneously. Although the separation among the two logics is analytically valuable, they are not necessarily exclusive in essence (Elken et al., 2011).

Rational choice institutionalism or "the logic of consequences" accepts policy actors as rational and goal-oriented figures who would like to maximize their interests by making cost and benefit analyses. From this perspective, actors try to solve a problem by looking around best practices and institutional solutions which serve more to their needs and interests (Börzel & Risse, 2011). Hence, it focuses on utility-maximizer domestic actors for whom the Europeanization changes opportunity structures and leads to redistribution of resources and differential empowerment. Inevitably, the Europeanization processes offer some actors new opportunities and additional resources to enlarge their influence, while constraining the sources, influence and abilities of the others, hereby changing domestic balance of power (Börzel & Risse, 2000).

Additionally, rational choice institutionalism refers to the existence of multiple veto points and formal institutions as two mediating factors effective in enabling or hindering domestic change due to the EU pressures of adjustment. In a country's institutional structure, there might be empowered actors with diverse interests who resist adaptational pressures deriving from the European level (Börzel & Risse, 2003). In that sense, existence of multiple veto points may empower certain actors and increase the confrontation to change. If there are many actors with power and influential in decision making and political system, it becomes more difficult to reach domestic consensus to achieve policy change (Börzel & Risse, 2000). In this regard, it is critical whether domestic centers of power, elites and veto players (either formal or informal like business actors) who are affected by the EU policies support the policy change or not, according to their own interests and cost-benefit analyses.

Secondly, existence of formal institutions may offer substantial and ideational assets and opportunities to actors and increase the possibility of change. European structures may also provide additional resources to domestic actors and institutions; however, they might not be able to utilize these additional sources if they do not have the necessary action capacity. Hence, having sufficient recourses (financial, expertise, know-how, staff etc.) is also critical (Börzel & Risse, 2000).

In line with the rational choice institutionalism perspective, Börzel and Risse (2011) also emphasize on "domestic incentives/logic of instrumental rationality" and "degrees of statehood/institutional and administrative capacity of states" as two of the four mediating factors through which Europeanization might lead to institutional change at domestic level. According to their explanation of domestic incentives, if domestic actors do not demand reforms or accept the EU rules and regulations, institutional change is unlikely to take place (Börzel & Risse, 2011). On the other hand, domestic actors may use EU demands to further their own interests, political agenda and power, if the EU requirements are compatible with the interests and strategies of the domestic political actors. Similarly, they also highlight that sustainable institutional change and alteration of domestic practices are unlikely to occur under the limited statehood and lack of institutional and administrative capacity (Börzel & Risse, 2011). Hence, not only the policy preferences of the states and domestic actors, but also their action capacity in terms of adaption of the EU policies and outcomes is critical. Even in the case of legally binding directives of the EU, national parliaments must move and adopt them into national law and their adaptative, institutional and administrative capacity and degrees of statehood play a crucial role (Börzel, 2002).

In relation with the action capacity of states, Börzel and Risse (2011) also offer "degree of interdependence/distribution of material and ideational resources between the EU and the other states" as a third intervening factor. They argue that, in most of the cases, mostly due to its economic and political power, external relations of the EU with many neighboring countries are rather asymmetrical which means that accession or neighboring countries have much to gain through a close relationship with the EU and that might increase the EU's ability to employ pressure (Börzel & Risse, 2011). However, some neighboring countries which, for instance, have resources like gas and

oil (e.g. Kazakhstan) are strategically important and the EU might still push for domestic change for its strategic and economic goals. On the other hand, the EU and BRICS relations is rather symmetrical which actually decreases the EU's ability to ask for domestic and institutional reforms. According to Börzel and Risse (2011), the EU's transformative power is even more limited in the regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America due to the geographic distance, everything else being equal, as well as the existence of alternative regional cooperation and integration models such as WTO, NAFTA and so on. In the case of countries and regions geographically distant from Europe, the EU's efforts to directly influence institutional changes become less substantial, although it is not the only factor (Börzel & Risse, 2011). In that respect, it might be argued that outcomes of Europeanization also depend on the position of specific state regarding the EU and it is critical to differentiate the member states, candidate and pre-accession countries and the rest of the world. As explained above, the rest of the world is not a homogenous group with respect to the strategies and domestic responses; since some of them might be strategically, politically and economically more important in the eyes of the EU (Elken et al., 2011).

On the other hand, with the rise of sociological and constructivist accents, Europeanization research has taken on critical dimensions, while focusing on the roles of norms, rules, discourses, ideas, and identities. These constructivist, critical, and normative developments of Europeanization aimed to go beyond the relatively "ahistorical" and constrained spatiotemporal conceptualization of Europeanization, which is largely restricted to the EU members (Karadağ, 2019).

As an intention is to offer a new analytical tool that has been shaped by accepted sociological perspective, Jacquot and Woll (2003) suggested a viewpoint attributing individual actors a central role. The concentration of the literature on institutional dynamics causes the difference and function of political actors in the process of adaptation to be underestimated. According to a viewpoint that stresses the macro level, where national institutions must contend with European policies, adaptive pressures are the only factors influencing national politics' process of adjustment. Only as an intermediary variable do national actors enter the picture. This viewpoint is sociological because it seeks to comprehend how the actors and their behavior are

created and how institutions change in response to the behavior of the individual. If no one takes the initiative to transmit a measure to the national level, it will not have any effect (Jacquot & Woll, 2003).

In this vein, according to Karadağ (2019), we would have access to a very helpful analytical framework with sociological constructivism to learn more about how Europe is perceived and constructed discursively. Sociological institutionalism or "the logic of appropriateness" are mostly about cognitive and normative Europeanization mechanisms, which refers to the process of persuasion and social learning. According to this understanding, rather than trying to maximize their own subjective interests, actors are guided by collective understandings and socially accepted rules, and they try to fulfill social expectations; they need to solve a problem by downloading an institutional model compatible with their given community. European policies, norms, culture, and understandings may create an adaptational pressure on domestic-level norms and understanding, if there is a misfit among them. In this framework, rather than (in)directly manipulating the cost-benefit calculations of the actors, the EU persuades them to comply with the EU rules (Börzel & Risse, 2000). In other words, domestic impact of the EU occurs through the socialization of local actors and their internalization of the EU norms as the legitimate ones.

As argued by Karadağ (2019), with its emphasis on interrelated causalities and meta-theoretical stance, sociological institutionalism provides a strong analytical stance that can be used to understand and ameliorate the EU's multifaceted and complex nature, as well as its effects on the third countries. Sociological institutionalist framework aims to explain the content of actor identities and preferences as well as the modes of social interaction, as opposed to viewing agents and fixed preferences as interacting through strategic exchange (Karadağ, 2019).

For the logic of appropriateness, two mediating factors are suggested to affect the degree that existing misfit results in the internalization of new norms and identities. In that sense, sociological institutionalism points out the existence of norm entrepreneurs/change agents and cooperative informal institutions that may persuade other actors to redefine their benefits and identities and activate the domestic

environment as a result of socialization and social learning. The more European norms, ideas and understandings are compatible with the domestic ones, the more likely will they be integrated in the local context (Börzel & Risse, 2000). According to Börzel and Risse (2003), there are two types of norm-promoting agents which might affect shared norms and identities and persuade other actors to redefine their interests and identities: epistemic communities and advocacy or principled issue networks. Epistemic communities are networks of actors with an entitlement and power of scientific knowledge, and they legitimize new norms and ideas by providing technical information about cause-and-effect relationships (e.g. central bankers and national technocrats who advocated monetarist approach for the implementation of single currency). Secondly, advocacy or principled issue networks refers to the groups that come together through shared beliefs and values, rather than scientific knowledge and persuade other actors to redefine their preferences and identities (Börzel & Risse, 2003).

Moreover, existence of a political culture and other informal institutions supporting consensus-building is also critical in this framework because consensus-oriented and cooperative decision-making culture might overcome veto points and lead to share of adaptational costs (Börzel & Risse, 2000). In that sense, they offer the "type of regimes (democracy vs. autocracy)" as the last diffusion mechanisms. Accordingly, democratic regimes in which the cost of adaptation is lower might positively affect state actors' willingness to encourage domestic changes in response to the EU demands. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes might be less willing to surrender their sovereignty compared to the democratic ones and they meet less pressure from below and society as the local actors do not have political autonomy. Moreover, the EU demands such as the rule of law, democracy, market economy and human rights threaten the survival of the authoritarian regimes (Börzel & Risse, 2011).

It is important to reiterate that these distinctions in terms of Europeanization mechanisms and approaches are rather analytical than empirical and most of the policies are characterized by a mixture of different Europeanization mechanisms. For instance, as underlined by Knill and Lehmkuhl (2002), proposing an institutional model for domestic compliance will also affect domestic opportunity structures,

beliefs, and expectations of domestic actors. Similarly, changes in domestic opportunity structures will have cognitive impacts on beliefs and expectations. Thus, there is no universal approach to explaining the diverse domestic effects of European policies, as varying domestic responses must be analyzed through different explanatory elements, often referred to as mediating factors.

	Adaptational pressure		
	High	Medium	Low
Facilitating factors	LoC: transformation LoA: inertia (unless external shock)	LoC: transformation LoA: gradual transformation	LoC: accommodation LoA: accommodation
No facilitating factors	LoC: accommodation LoA: inertia	LoC: accommodation/absorption LoA: absorption	LoC: inertia LoA: absorption

Figure 2.4 Outcomes of Europeanization (adopted from Börzel & Risse, 2000).

Source: Elken, M., Gornitzka, A., Maasen, P., Vukasovic, M. (2011). European Integration and the Transformation of Higher Education (p.33).

Lastly, as explained in Figure 2.4 from Elken et. al. (2011) adopting from Börzel and Risse (2000), Europeanization might lead to different outcomes varying from retrenchment to transformation depending on the existence and level of facilitating factors and adaptational pressure. While retrenchment refers to negative Europeanization, inertia implies no change in the short-run due to the delays in implementation or resistance towards EU-driven rules and regulations. On the other hand, absorption refers to low degree of change with no real change in domestic processes, policies and structures; accommodation implies medium degree of change in which policies and processes are adapted, but the key features and attached rationale are preserved. Finally, transformation refers to high degree of change through which domestic institutions and attached rationale, norms and values are replaced with the extensively new ones (Elken et al., 2011).

2.3.4 Europeanization of Non-EU Countries

It is clear that Europeanisation beyond the EU is also variable, as it is the case for the EU member states, since its mechanisms and contents vary across regions, countries and policy fields. For instance, in Norway and Switzerland, the EU membership was declined by the referenda; but the EU established European Economic Area in 1992 in which EEA countries were formally obliged to adopt EU legislation about the Single market; hence these quasi members are not official members of the EU, but subject to core of the EU rules and governance in the area of Single Market (Schimmelfenning, 2010). On the other hand, as for candidate countries, the main mechanism that the EU applies is conditionality through which the EU offers membership, access to the internal market and funds by setting conditions and monitoring candidates' compliance with the EU rules and institutions. For the neighboring countries, the EU introduced its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) after its decisive enlargement in 2004 to improve its relations with the neighboring countries that do not have membership perspective in the near future. Unlike member states or candidate countries, ENP countries are not unilaterally based on the EU acquis, rather action plans are negotiated and monitored bilaterally among them. Different than the candidate countries, the strongest reward-the EU membership- is not offered in EU's relations with the ENP countries. In this context, the EU does not have an uncontested bargaining power as in candidate countries and competes with other actors such as Russia in its relations with ENP countries. Additionally, once we consider the highly industrialized OECD countries which are less depended on the Single Market, membership and enlargement are not on the agenda and they either have bilateral relations or in the context of international organizations such as the UN and WTO. Lastly, as for the other regions such as Latin America, Southeast Asia or Africa, the EU has established political dialogues, institutionalized relations and financial aid and cooperation programs, which means that an element of socialization exists in these relationships. Moreover, regional organizations such as ASEAN and African Union have emulated EU institutions and policies, which means that the EU has been considered as an institutional model to overcome internal crises (Schimmelfenning, 2010). This study and below categorization of Schimmelfenning (2010) in Figure 2.5

shows that the EU has differential relations with different parts of the world and offers various dynamics of Europeanization differently.

	Contents	Mechanisms	Conditions	Impact
Quasi-members	Market regulation	Conditionality and Externalisation	Strong dependence	Strong, partial
Candidate countries	All	Conditionality	Strong dependence, strong incentives	Strong, general
Neighborhood countries	All	Conditionality and Socialisation	Medium dependence, weak incentives	Medium, partial
OECD countries	Market regulation	Externalisation	Medium interdependence	Medium, partial
Other regions	Regionalism	Imitation (and Socialisation)	Weak interdependence	Weak

Figure 2.5 Europeanization with Different Parts of the World.

Source: Schimmelfenning, F. (2010). *Europeanisation Beyond the Member States.* Comparative Government and European Policy. (p.328).

Moreover, as proposed by the Europeanization literature, the member states and accession countries comply with the EU rules and regulations (to some extent) due to the nature of their relationship with the EU; this compliance occurs even in many neighboring countries which are expected to adopt part of acquis communautaire in order to make business and trade with the EU and member states (Börzel & Risse, 2011). According to Börzel and Risse (2011), in the case of neighboring countries, since the EU cannot coerce them into domestic institutional change and offer adequate incentives to erase the adaptational costs, the misfit between the EU and the local processes does not turn into strong adaptational pressure.

In the same vein, Schimmelfenning (2010) suggests that Europeanization works via the manipulation of incentives and cost-benefit calculations of the countries, by offering conditionality-rewards such as membership, different types of agreements, trade agreements, accession treaties, market access, financial aid etc. and sanctions

such as termination of the membership or the agreements. The effectiveness of this mechanism depends on the credibility and the size of the EU conditionality as well as the domestic adoption costs which must not be higher than rewards. Through the framework shown in Figure 2.6, Schimmelfenning (2010) suggests that, in addition to conditionality, the logic of consequences also includes the mechanism of externalization in which the EU does not proactively promotes its policies and models, but external actors (such as the countries whose economies are strongly interconnected with the EU) still adopt EU rules which may generate net costs otherwise.

	Direct	**Indirect**
Logic of consequences	*Conditionality* (size and credibility of incentives, costs of compliance)	*Externalisation* (market size, legalisation and centralisation of rules)
Logic of appropriateness	*Socialisation*	*Imitation*
	("noviceness" and uncertainty; legitimacy and authority of EU; identification and resonance with EU; frequency and density of contacts)	

Figure 2.6 Mechanisms and Conditions of Europeanisation.

Source: Schimmelfenning, F. (2010). Europeanisation Beyond the Member States (p.325).

On the other hand, for the mediating factors with regards to the non-EU countries, Iangbein and Börzel (2013) explain that Eastern Neighborhood countries have weaker administrative and institutional capacities and less developed democracies compared to Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, they also mention that there is a high misfit between the European policies, processes and institutions and the domestic ones. However, their study also confirms that policy change still happened despite the limited capacity and high costs as well as the lack of EU memberships perspective. Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are closer to the EU membership in the future and their relations with the EU is asymmetrical; while the relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan is more symmetrical due to Azerbaijan's control over energy sources and Armenia's relations and bounds with Russia. However, according to Iangbein and Börzel (2013), these macro level factors hardly explain policy changes by their own.

For them, under the conditions of poor democracy, limited institutional capacity, preferences of powerful state authorities and informal veto players such as business actors and economic elites might play a stronger role and policy change is most likely if it is supported by these actors or EU policies are compatible with their own interests.

Hence, one could argue that the EU membership is the key incentive and mechanism to foster policy change in response to EU demands. Since it is not at play for Eastern Neighborhood countries, conditionality and capacity building are applied at the policy level only. This policy-specific conditionality or policy-specific rewards may involve market access, visa facilitation, financial support etc. to support the domestic reforms and erase the adaptational costs in specific policy fields. Moreover, the EU is not the only and not necessarily the most important actor affecting the policy change in the region; there are other international and transnational actors and organizations, corporations, governments and donors being influential in the region's policy making (e.g. Russia as an additional regional player) (Iangbein & Börzel, 2013).

As another example regarding the Europeanization of non-member states, Börzel and Soyaltin-Colella (2012) analyze the Europeanization of Türkiye and Western Balkans as in comparison of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). They highlight that during the accession processes, the EU mostly relies on positive and negative incentives for candidates' adaptation of the acquis communautaire. For CEE countries, membership reward as well as financial and technical assistance were convincing enough to overcome the veto players' opposition and the process of Europeanization has empowered and legitimized the reformists in CEE to foster domestic reforms, which again shows that mediating factors may facilitate or impair Europeanization (Börzel & Soyaltın-Colella, 2012).

Börzel and Soyaltin-Colella (2012) also underline that, empowering domestic reformists is not enough if actors do not have required resources, as also explained above. For this reason, they consider Western Balkans being quite different, since most of these countries are still only partly free and have weak or debated statehood with ethnic tensions, disputed borders, scarce state capacity and resilient clientelist networks compared to CEE countries who made constant improvement towards being

consolidated democracies with active market economies. Once we consider the power asymmetries offered by Börzel and Risse (2011), it is worth to mention by Börzel and Soyaltin-Colella (2012) that Türkiye's relations with the EU are less asymmetrical than the Western Balkans due to its size and economic strengths, which weakens the adaptational pressure of the EU on Türkiye. Additionally, in terms of the degrees of statehood, compared to the Western Balkans, Türkiye has less problems of limited statehood. Türkiye had comprehensive and consecutive reforms for the EU accession especially between 1999 and 2004, during which the EU incentives and conditionality towards Türkiye was still credible. The EU provided new opportunities and legitimacy for the newly established Justice and Development Party (AKP) government to overcome the resistance of domestic veto players such as the military. However, domestic political actors mostly use the EU rhetoric as a legitimizing tool to pursue their own political interests; in that sense, through its initial reforms for the EU accession, the AKP instrumentalized the EU to widen its electoral support. As its electoral support increased in the post-2005 period, membership perspective started to be less credible and the EU's significance in domestic institutional changes became less relevant, as a result of which the AKP government has also shifted the focus of the Turkish foreign policy away from the EU (Börzel & Soyaltın-Colella, 2012). Yet, Türkiye is presented here as an example of relevant case study in the literature and it will not be one of our case countries to be investigated.

2.3.5 Europeanization of Higher Education

Education, particularly higher education policies are basically defined and implemented by the individual member states of the EU who has a more supportive and coordination role rather than having sole competence over the member states. Member states have full responsibility for the content and organization of the educational systems, but they still need to exercise educational policies in compliance with the EU law and principles (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2015). The field of education, higher education in particular, is more exposed to global developments compared to other public policy fields due to its universal nature and constant competition which is getting increasingly challenging with the globalization.

In this environment, most of the HEIs are operating by incentives and sanctions offered by government regulations, while on the other hand, they are also encouraged by the governments to secure alternative funds through international operations beyond national boundaries (Guri-Rosenblit, 2015). In addition, due to their increasing operations beyond national borders, institution-to-institution relations have overtaken the country-to-country educational diplomacy (Guri-Rosenblit, 2015). Higher education, which has already been more open and international than any other sector due to producing global knowledge became even more prominent in the global knowledge economies as mediums for cross-border relations and flows of people, information, knowledge and technologies. In this networked global atmosphere, where each university is observable to every other, it is no longer likely for individual HEIs or nations to fully isolate themselves from the global impacts (Marginson & van der Wende, 2006).

Once the literature on Europeanization of higher education is considered, most of the studies on European higher education programs basically examine the processes from the perspective of EU policy making (e.g. Eurobarometer survey, reports and country fact sheets conducted by the European Commission, Dakowska & Serrano-Velarde, 2018; Garben, 2012) and the programs' impact on participants' competencies, employability and European identity (e.g. Teichler, 2002; Papatsiba, 2005; Litjens, 2005; Sigalas, 2009 & 2010; Wilson, 2011; Kuhn, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Weele, 2014; Psychogyiou, 2015; Yılmaz, 2018) or provide statistical data on their impacts on the non-EU countries (such as the impact of Tempus program on Central Asia). The literature hardly questions the case of the non-European countries in the field of higher education and their motivations from a bottom-up perspective.

In terms of the role of the EU, Vukasovic and Huisman (2018) claim that different layers can play different roles in domestic policy changes, with regard to the higher education. In that sense, they identify three roles of the European governance layer as summarized in the Figure 2.7, namely vertical dynamic, horizontal dynamic and temporal-ordering dynamic.

	Europeanization (vertical dynamic)	Europe-assisted transfer (horizontal dynamic)	domestic entrepreneurs (temporal-ordering dynamic)
Key process	Institutionalization of European preferences in the domestic context	Institutionalization of preferences from other countries or organizations in the domestic context	Use of European initiatives to legitimize existing domestic preferences
Function of the European layer	Provide a more or less clear model, e.g. the Bachelor/Master degree structure	Provide a communication platform that facilitates policy transfer between countries or organizations	Provide a legitimizing label that can be strategically used by domestic actors

Figure 2.7 The Three Roles of the European Governance Layer.

Source: Vukasovic, M. & Huisman J., (2018). Europeanization, Policy Transfer or Domestic Opportunity? Comparison of European Impact in Higher Education Policy (p.271).

Vertical practices and preferences mentioned in Figure 2.7 refer to the European governance in which particular policy preferences are framed and fostered as European. They include the Bologna Process requirements such as three-layer degree structure, quality assurance and so on as well as the EU strategic targets (e.g. 3% of the GDP to be allocated to research) and priorities of the EU cooperation and framework programs. Horizontal dynamics on the other hand refer to the cross-national communication which facilitates policy transfer between countries and organizations. Lastly, they underline the opportunism of policy entrepreneurs who may use European initiatives to push for their specific domestic preferences (Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018). However, Vukasovic and Huisman (2018) underline that, depending on the domestic institutional arrangements and actor constellations, these three roles of the European governance may overlap. Similarly, there might be policy fields in which the European developments are hardly relevant, and the policy change is predominantly result of the domestic dynamics. Hence, there is a persistent diversity especially with regards to the policy instruments and outcomes.

Moreover, as one of the important contributions in the literature, Elken et al. (2011) analyzes the field of higher education through the logics offered by different approaches and proposes three hypotheses based on the model developed by Schimelfening and Sedelmeier (2010). In this framework, according to their Social

Learning Model or EU-driven Europeanization (following the logic of appropriateness), states or HEIs embrace European processes, as long as they are convinced about the appropriates of them. Hence, the legitimacy of EU processes and their relations and identifications with the domestic procedures with regard to the actors in the HEIs or the field of higher education in general is critical. Secondly, according to their External Incentive Model or EU driven Europeanization, following the logic of consequences, states or HEIs accept European rules and regulations if the rewards are higher than the domestic adaption costs. In that sense, clearness, credibility, size and speed of rules, rewards and threats and the veto players who would be affected by these processes are critical. From this perspective, it becomes highly relevant to analyze the rules established with the help of rewards in the forms of financial assistance (e.g. Erasmus, Tempus, Framework Programs etc.). It is also quite important to note that these rules are being implemented and interpreted by a various number of veto players in different levels, including the individual academic staff. Lastly, according to their Lesson-Drawing Model or non-EU driven Europeanization, following predominantly the logic of appropriateness, states or HEIs accept European rules and regulations as long as they see these rules as a solution to their domestic problems. From this perspective, the existent dissatisfaction about a policy or actor in higher education and participation of actors in transnational epistemic communities are critical. However, it is also critical to mention that prior to the explicit establishment of the EU rules and regulations, Europeanization might already take place even in member states or candidate countries through lesson drawing or policy borrowing from other actors and levels (Elken et al., 2011).

Furthermore, according to Mercille and Murphy (2015), especially in recent years, the most direct and influential policies of the EU in the field of higher education were those associated with the Bologna Process (1999) through which national higher education systems were re-designed to establish compatible and comparable with European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and equivalent degrees across countries. The reports and analysis of the Bologna Program suggests that the process led to considerable changes of national higher education systems in degree structures, curriculum designs, quality assurance, mobility programs and so on (Spanke, 2017). According to Elken et al. (2011) on the other hand, the Bologna reports prepared to

follow progress of HEIs towards its benchmarks follows the goodness of fit approach in a form of naming and shaming. It has been not only a process of recognition and mobility within the EHEA, but also a model for other countries and regions of the world that may work as a policy-learning and borrowing as an outcome of policy transfer at the end. Not only through the Bologna Process, but also via a wide range of instruments such as funding, programs, recommendation, and strategy documents (i.e. Lisbon Strategy), the EU supports and shapes the coherence and consistency among higher education governance and policies (Spanke, 2017).

Also, Dakowska and Serrano (2018) suggest that especially after the establishment of Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the Europe 2020 targets (2010), which emphasize the significance of education for economic growth and competitiveness, formulation of higher education policies have been affected as well. Particularly since then, higher education turned into a policy area which is governed mostly through policy learning and indicators, benchmarking initiatives, and strategies (OMC) (Dakowska & Serrano, 2018). As explained earlier, OMC or soft law measures of the EU refer to the more flexible guidelines, recommendations, declarations, opinions, best practices, and pilot projects that are not legally binding but may still create some legal effects.

As for the process of OMC on policy-formulations and implementations, Dakowska and Serrano (2018) state that national policy priorities are subordinated to a common agenda; but this does not automatically mean that all member states share the same attitudes, benchmarks and perspectives on education and meet the common goals on the same level and way. As explained above, higher education is one of the policy areas in which there is no explicit adaptational pressure coming from the EU. Partly due to this reason, it is clear that almost all countries including the most powerful and influential member states have misfit in different policy areas, particularly if they are unable to upload their preferences to the European level. This is also valid for the area of higher education. Higher education systems in different countries experience varying degree of adaptational pressure; in some countries the misfit might be about policy instruments, while it is related with the policy structures or beliefs in others (Elken et al., 2011). For instance, while relatively new members such as Slovenia are more open to adopting the European discourse, the UK (even though it is not a member

anymore) had always been more skeptical and reluctant to comply with common objectives (Michael & Christoph, 2017).

Elken et. al. (2011) also suggest that the Europeanization and relationally higher education is attributed quite different meanings even among the old and new member states. The new members or East, according to Elken et. al. (2011), tend to consider Europeanization as an economic and political transition. Hence, higher education is also seen as a part of these overall reform process, European integration and even accession negotiations. Moreover, due to the weaker economies and lower investments in several policy fields including higher education, the EU's funding mechanisms such as Erasmus programs might be regarded as comparatively more significant for the East than the West (Elken et al., 2011). Hence, domestic differences, interpretive approaches, national adaptations in the framing of the EU as well as the complexity of national context beyond the expectation of policy convergence should be also taken into consideration.

Even though soft governance processes at the European and international levels are increasingly affecting national arrangements, it is also admitted that individual national higher education systems are still embedded in country-specific regimes as well as historical, cultural and institutional settings (Michael & Christoph, 2017). Global or European trends may be processed differently in many singular frameworks, depending on institutional structures; hence, the speed and route of domestic reforms might diverge across different states (Michael & Christoph, 2017). In that regard, studies that analyze the changes in national higher education policies since 1999 (Bologna Process) also suggest that although significant convergence of policy objective and rhetoric has been applied so far, policy instruments and outcomes have been diversified persistently (Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018).

In addition to the above findings that examine the higher education as a policy area in relation with the Europeanization and the EU's roles and tools, various other case studies are available in the literature with regard to the analyses that potentially addressed our intended theme. For instance, Vukasovic and Huisman (2018) analyzed the higher education policy changes (specifically two distinct higher policy issues;

quality assurance and the relationship between the university and non-university sector) in four European countries namely Belgium/Flanders, Croatia, the Netherlands and Serbia, by looking primary higher education policy documents (e.g. legislation, policy proposals, white papers etc.) and organizing 20 interviews with relevant policy actors. According to the result of their study, in these four countries, Europeanization is not the prominent factor that led to convergence, rather it serves as legitimatizing tool for the already existing policy preferences and leads to the convergence in policy rhetoric and objectives, but diversified policy instruments and outcomes (Vukasovic & Huisman, 2018).

Vukasovic (2013) also asked the question of "how do higher education systems and organizations respond to environmental pressures to change, in particular when these pressures are coming from the European level?", by drawing attention that (in)formal rules take place at all levels including macro (higher education system) and meso levels (HEIs, Quality Assurance agencies etc.). She analyzed various reports and studies in Quality Assurance in addition to the official documents of Bologna Process and the EU. Vukasovic (2013) proposes that within the framework of rational choice institutionalist or external incentives perspective, a HEI will embrace European policies and rules, if it institutionally regards the benefits of rewards (e.g. funding, cooperation partners, networks such as Jean Monnet Chairs etc.) exceeding the adaptation costs. Hence, according to this proposition, the larger and clearly set benefits would lead to faster and more institutionalized rules at the HEIs. In that case, in addition to the promise of rewards, consequences of non-compliance need to be credible, which is actually inexplicit in higher education, mostly due to comparatively weak competences of the EU in this policy area. In that regard, Vukasovic (2013) underlines that non-compliance might be easier to detect in clearer rules and regulations such as the calculation of ECTS and workloads; however, it is more difficult to investigate compliance in less clear regulations such as the encouragement of European elements in higher education which offers to domestic actors' room for interpretation and thereby re-nationalization. Moreover, existence of a large number of veto players at various levels who may block the decisions is also critical with regards to the adaptation costs. In terms of the higher education, these actors might be academic staff in governing bodies or even individual faculty members in classrooms

or rectors of the universities, in addition to governmental actors and agencies. Lastly, Vukasovic (2013) highlights that the adaptation of European rules and regulations will be unlikely in case of the existence of strong institutional legacies or weak administration capacities in higher education (e.g. comprehensive administrative capacity is required for the applications of the EU funding and coordination of projects).

On the other hand, according to the social learning perspective, the rules and regulations offered by the European level as well as their content and processes should be accepted as legitimate by the related actors of the higher education. Vukasovic (2013) also proposes that if the models offered by the EU are entirely different from the already existing ones, socializing relevant actors into adopting them will be difficult. In other words, the adoption of European processes will be more likely, if the actors who will adopt European rules can identify themselves with proposed process. Within the framework of this perspective, participation of relevant domestic actors (e.g. ministry officers, representatives of quality assurance agencies or HEIs) is critical in terms of the legitimacy of the processes; it is even more critical especially when the relevant domestic stakeholders tend to use European processes for enhancing their domestic agendas. In this regard, European or transnational epistemic communities or issue networks established around cooperation programs, joint projects or organized by the EU itself (e.g. European Universities Association/EUA, Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe/UNICA) might facilitate the identification of key actors who may learn the proposed policies and become convinced about their appropriateness, as a result. Considering the EU's lack of clear competence with regards to the higher education and the nature of higher education itself, social learning perspective is particularly significant. However, Vukasovic (2013) concludes that in none of these perspectives, higher education system, organizations and actors can be considered as entirely passive and changes in policies and processes are more complicated than simple environmental determinism.

From the perspective of Europeanization of higher education, it is also relevant to claim that the relationship between the state and higher education has been affected as well, considering the new governmental actors such as new ministries involved in

higher education policy making and focus on quality assurance and accreditation. Hence, it is also worth to mention that the EU-offered higher education programs lead to the establishment of new administrative attention and agencies responsible for the coordination and implementation of the EU programs such as the National Agency in Türkiye (Elken et al., 2011).

2.3.5.1 Europeanization and Transfer of Higher Education Policies out of the EU

Next chapter will present higher education mechanisms of the EU developed for non-EU countries in a more detailed way. However, as a transition to the following chapter, it is worth to mention that as the biggest trading block in the world, the EU must assert more active, effective and leading role on the world stage in shaping the future of global economy. The EU is one of the most open and interlinked economies of the world; but competitions from developing and emerging countries such as China and India are intensifying. Especially under these conditions, in order to preserve its competitiveness, expanding the influence zone in which the EU rules are applied would create new opportunities for both the EU and its neighbors (European Commission, 2010). For this reason, internationalization of higher education beyond Europe has been a strategic purpose of the EU states and HEIs (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2015). It is essential for the European HEIs to recruit international students due to decreasing public funds and it is also important in the sense of raising youth with a various of capabilities (such as language proficiency, flexible, life-long learner, multicultural in mind etc.) required by the labor market and whose participation in the society will shape the future stability at the national and then regional level. The EU has an active policy of cooperation with non-EU countries in the field of higher education to create the EU as a center of excellence in education and training; to enhance the overall quality of European education; to boost innovation and job creation in Europe by attracting international and skilled youth; to enhance understanding and visibility of the EU and promote its values and interest through people-to-people contacts (Dakowska & Serrano, 2018).

Consequently, even though (member) states have the sole competence in the field of education, the EU still supports the convergence of higher education systems and promotes EU-like reforms not only within the Union but also in other parts of the world, especially in neighboring countries, with the purpose of ensuring a more stable and educated neighbor which can also serve for the labor market demands. Tempus for instance, launched in 1990, was aiming to promote voluntary convergence of the higher education systems in the partner countries through the EU developments, experiences and good practices (Botonero, 2013). Establishment and activities of the EHEA is considered as a model for educational reforms in other regions of the world as well; especially the Bologna Process (1999) has been influencing reforms beyond Europe and promoted the soft convergence of higher education agendas. The Bologna Process which goes beyond the EU members with 47 members from different parts of the world as the most significant and transformative higher education process has made its signatories to undertake significant reforms in their domestic higher education systems (e.g. ECTS credits, 3-cyle structure, credit transfer and mobility) (Croiser & Parveva, 2013). As stated in the study of Kushnir (2014), for Eastern and Central European countries, the EU membership and European affiliation could be the main reason and incentive to join the Bologna Process; nevertheless, peer pressure or a sense of obligation resulting from the requirements of knowledge-based economy and competition may also be understood as the additional incentives for countries to join the process. Whatever the incentive, several scholars (Dittirch et al.2004, Heinze and Knill 2008, Papatsiba 2006, Pyykko 2008, Zgaga 2009 etc.) who analyze cross-country implementations of Bologna Process have suggested that cultural, historical, economic context of the countries shape their experience of Bologna Process differently (Kushnir, 2014). Hence, in a picture where each country's higher education system has been developed independently of each other, the expectation of convergence of diverse higher education systems seems much complex (Papatsiba, 2006).

Although the number of studies analyzing the Europeanization of higher education in non-EU countries is rare, the already existing literature still offers some insights for the purposes of this dissertation. For instance, in his master thesis, Soso (2021) analyzed the impact of the EU external governance on higher education reforms in Georgia through in dept interviews conducted with the higher education reform experts

in Georgia as well as strategy documents, laws and regulations on higher education and used the External Incentive Model offered by Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier (2020) and rational choice institutionalism approach. Georgia, like other post-Soviet countries faced severe pressure to modernize its economic and political structure, joined the Bologna Process in 2005 and signed the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014. The study of Soso (2021) suggests that Georgian higher education reforms and modernization attempts have been particularly affected by the EU and its mechanisms such as Tempus and Erasmus projects and introduction of Bologna practices. As another important finding, Soso (2021) proposes that political polarization and political elites as veto players are quite critical with regard to the Georgian higher education. This is because of his expectation that higher education reforms would be implemented more intensively if the government's commitment to the EU processes are stronger and the requirements of higher education processes are more determinate (clarity and conditionality). Although they are committed to the EU membership, domestic adaptational costs affect the cost-benefit calculations of the political elite in Georgia and they hinder strategic development of higher education in the long run. Moreover, due to the lack of conditionality and concrete EU monitoring in higher education, Georgia was able to present reports more positive than the actual picture (Soso, 2021).

Likewise, Dobbins and Khachatryan (2015) assess the changes in the higher education policies of Georgia and Armenia with a particular focus on the transformed relations between state and higher education institutions as a result of the EU effect. They choose Georgia and Armenia due to their being geographically more vulnerable to power seeking practices of Russian Federation where the impact of Sovietization was also more pronounced than their CEE counterparts. Dobbins and Khachatryan (2015) analyzed "*the changes in governance and the degree of convergence over three higher education models, namely state-control model, academic self-rule model and market-oriented model by looking at three areas of higher education governance; overall regulatory framework, funding policy and quality assurance"* (Figure 2.8).

	State control model	Market-oriented model	Academic self-rule model
Regulatory framework for HE			
Core decision-making body	State	University management	Community of scholars/ Professional chairs
State control instruments	Manpower planning System design	Incentives for competition, quality improvements	Legal, financial framework
Sets academic profiles/ curriculum design	State/Academia	University management/ academia/external stakeholders	Academia
Sets strategic goals for HE institutions	State	University management with external stakeholders	Academia
Sets admission conditions	State	University management	State
Funding policy			
Main funding base	State budget (university budget part of state budget)	Diversified (tuition/ donations/research grants/ private entities/state)	State budget (with own university budget)
State funding approach	Itemized (low budgetary discretion for universities)	Lump sum (high budgetary discretion for university management)	Mixed-type (high budgetary discretion for university)
Mode of allocation	Input-based	Output-based	Input-based (objectives negotiated by the state and universities)
Strategic investments	State defined	Multi-faceted (undertaken by university management, faculties, via spin-off companies, technology centres)	Occasional, chair-based
Quality control			
Who controls/ evaluates?	Ministry	(state or quasi-governmental) Accreditation/evaluation bodies	Self-evaluation by academic peers
What is controlled?	Academic *processes* (legal compliance and institutional capacity)	Quality of academic *products*	Quality of research output
When does quality control take place?	Ex ante	Ex post	Not systematized

Figure 2.8 Three Model of Higher Education Governance.

Source: Dobbins, M. & Khachatryan, S., (2015). Europeanization in the "Wild East?" Analyzing Higher Education Governance Reform in Georgia and Armenia, High Education, (p.195).

As for Armenia, Dobbins and Khachatryan (2015) suggest that there is no empirical evidence for Russia's impact on the governance of higher education, rather, the modernization practices have been largely driven by domestic power actors. The study concludes that the state actors in Armenia actively enlarged quality assurance in order to meet Bologna indicators, while initiating new institutions to increase the political control over higher education institutions at the same time. Similar to Armenia, a major Russian influence over Georgian higher education was not detected. The results for

Georgia equally suggest that there have been various reforms to support universities' capacities for autonomous actions and academic self-regulation, while the government increased state control through evaluation of research performance and imposition of new administration structures, at the same time. Consequently, in both countries political elite/actors were argued to appear to be very effective in the higher education governance and they act selectively by adopting reforms to the extent that they do not entirely undermine their authority over higher education (Dobbins & Khachatryan, 2015).

On the other hand, the study of Onursal-Beşgül (2016) is an instance of veto players and the impact of their rhetoric with regards to the Europeanization of non-EU countries. Onursal-Beşgül (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with experts in Türkiye (e.g. officials from Turkish National Agency and Turkish Higher Education Council) and representatives working in the international offices of a number of Turkish HEIs and analyzed national reports. Onursal-Beşgil (2016) also asked the question of "*why states choose to voluntarily adopt norms and how policy transfer occurs in soft policy areas where there is no top-down pressure for change*?". In this regard, she proposes that voluntary policy transfer occurs when policy makers are already searching for alternative models and reformation of the already existing system or due to their fear of being left behind for which the mechanisms of comparison such as national reports, peer reviews etc. are crucial. Moreover, she suggests that although Europeanization is taking place institutionally with regards to the reforms in Turkish higher education, in terms of the normative Europeanization, the agents of change refrain from mentioning the European level as a reference point, rather they refer to the internationalization. She explains that majority of the interviewees defined Bologna Process and even Erasmus Programs as an instrument of internationalization, rather than Europeanization and mentioned that these processes should be treated distinctly from the EU and the accession process, mostly due to the diminishing legitimacy and credibility of the EU in Türkiye (Onursal-Beşgül, 2016).

Considering and concluding what has been explained so far and as it will be discussed in the following chapters, the EU has been aiming to establish higher education programs not only for EU members but also for non-EU countries via comprehensive

programs such as Tempus, Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programs in addition to the Bologna Process. Within this framework, it is quite interesting to see that even those countries which do not have a membership perspective in their future (e.g. Kazakhstan and China in our case) become part of the EU programs and voluntarily transfer EU regulations into their higher education systems, even though it requires comprehensive educational reforms which could be too challenging or superficial.

2.4 Conclusion of the Chapter

As the world becomes more interconnected and the number of players operating on different layers rises, policies and concepts are also being disseminated more widely via NGOs, think tanks, international and regional organizations like the EU and the OECD, unlike the eras during which national states were the only and the most influential actors and peer-to-peer transfer between them were more evident. As underlined by Bayırbağ (2014), being now mostly a global construct rather than a national one; supranational, regional and global authorities played an assertive role in the policy making process within the framework of proliferated public authorities at different scales and institutional structures. In this multi-centered, fragmented and networked policy making process, not only nation states but also other actors find it more difficult to make policies and solve increasingly complex problems alone (Morçöl, 2014). Within global framework of public policy making, actors are suggested to increasingly learn from one another or monitor, transfer and implement best practices. In this sense, actors including the nation states, monitor the policies of their rivals vigilantly and try to adopt and transfer international policies, standards and best practices in order not to lag behind and stay competitive in the global political and economic order (Gül H. , 2014). That being said, due to increasing complexity of today's multi-centered world, policy transfer now also occurs between states and international/transnational non-state actors and organizations, which expands the definition of policy transfer. Also, the possibility to transfer policies has expanded for policy makers at all levels, both vertically and horizontally, thanks to communication technologies, global governance, and various actors.

Within this networked and multi-centered global structure, as claimed by Radaelli (2000), the EU—one of the most influential organizations in global politics—has evolved into a platform of exchange for the dissemination of policies in a range of areas, from foreign and energy policy to environment policies, from which member states are increasingly downloading and uploading policies. As an organization that promotes policy convergence among its members in a range of policy areas, the EU on the one hand already facilitates policy convergence among its members as a result of membership requirements. It does, however, also put forth policy models that purport to address issues in a number of non-Union policy domains. As a result, it serves as an expanding platform for the transfer of policies to non-member nations as well. In that regard, the EU has been an active player in the field of higher education not only for member states but also for non-EU countries, even though it does not have an explicit competence on this policy area.

The question of policy transfer with regard to the EU has become more prominent with the establishment of Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in 2000 which makes the approach fitting more into the context of this study. The OMC refers to a transfer, learning and socialization process of the EU based on soft incentives and persuasion such as common guidelines, indicators, benchmarking, peer reviews, periodic evaluations, exchange of good practices (Radaelli, 2003). The OMC as one of the policy transfer mechanisms of the EU is applied specifically in the policy areas where the EU does not have clear and coercive competence such as the higher education. The OMC is explicitly applied in higher education programs of the EU, through releasing annual evaluation reports detailing how well each country is performing under Erasmus+, Tempus and similar programs and promoting competition among nations to obtain the highest scores. Since the main focus of this study will be higher education and the EU's higher education programs, a policy transfer method such as the OMC, which the EU applies in the areas such as higher education, serves as a useful theoretical tool for this study.

This is being said, policy transfer analysis offers an organized method for researching the dissemination of ideas, practices and policies in various contexts, such as the EU to non-EU countries as well as how they are received, interpreted and applied in

various institutional and national contexts. Its main goal is to comprehend the mechanisms, actors, outcomes and drivers of the transfer processes. The policy transfer framework serves as one of theoretical pillars of this study, since this research focuses on non-EU countries adopting higher education policies and practices from the European level to the national level (or at the very least, use them as a model) as well as its emphasis on the agents (who transfer?), types (voluntary or coercive?) and motivations (why transfer?) of transfer process.

On the other hand, compared to other public service bodies, higher education institutions have different and special status which may have different models of governance such as collegial model (autonomous), the market-oriented model and state-centered model (Bayırbağ, 2014). Nevertheless, autonomy of these institutions should not be overstated, as the majority of HEIs are still nationally embedded and depended on government legislation and support and they are not independent of national contexts and domestic structures (Marginson & van der Wende, 2006). Mostly due to this dependence on national settings; national institutions including universities do not experience global trends in uniform, equal, stable and fully predictable manner (Marginson & van der Wende, 2006). They need to re-define their mission and functioning in their national contexts according to national priorities and local needs while they are also adjusting to operating in the international higher education network and setting.

From this vein, an actor-focused bottom up and sociological institutionalist framework- a second theoretical pillar of the study is also necessary because the goal of this study is to comprehend the viewpoints and interpretations of International Office Professionals working in higher education institutions. The objective of this research is to deeply understand how non-EU countries manage the process of Europeanization in their distinct institutional and societal environments of higher education. In other word, this study aims to analyze domestic dynamics of policy transfer with a specific emphasis on local and national contexts, which requires a bottom-up perspective. This is because individual higher education systems are embedded in country-specific regimes, and global or European trends may be digested and transferred differently in varying circumstances. Hence, domestic differences,

interpretive approaches, national adaptations in the framing of the EU as well as the complexity of national context should be also taken into consideration. Exactly in this direction, this dissertation will use a bottom-up methodology to investigate how actors in the selected non-EU countries' higher education institutions actively participate in Europeanization process, interpret the EU higher education programs and policies and implement them locally, by encapsulating nuances of domestic experiences.

When hard law is in place and the EU provides a clear model; coercive, top-down, and goodness of fit approaches may be helpful. However, since the education and particularly the higher education is one of the policy areas with no explicit adaptational pressure, the bottom-up perspective fits well with the purposes of this study. Therefore, this study is a good fit for the bottom-up research design, which starts with domestic actors and tracks the process and turning points over time to determine whether the major change originated domestically or was influenced by exogenous variables like the EU. In that respect, this dissertation will use a bottom-up research design, which views Europeanization as a process that should be explained and focuses on the actors' perspectives, interests, values, and norms framing their actions. This is in contrast to top-down research design, which starts at the EU level and treats Europeanization as an independent and explanatory variable as the main source of domestic change. The assessment necessitates a deeper comprehension of domestic dynamics because a wide range of external or internal factors can also drive domestic change, which may or may not be related to the adaptational pressure coming from the EU.

This study considers bottom-up Europeanization under an overarching umbrella of sociological institutionalist perspective, with its focus on the logic of appropriateness. This is due to its already emphasis on social learning and persuasion, social actors, institutions and networks in shaping institutional change, which also emphasizes that domestic actors are guided by collective understanding, socially accepted rules and social expectations (Karadağ, 2019; Börzel & Risse, 2000; Jacquot & Woll, 2003) The social learning perspective is especially important given the EU's unclear authority over higher education and the nature of higher education itself. In this vein, policies and processes offered by the EU level should be accepted legitimate by the domestic

actors, which might complicate the adaptation, if the offered models are entirely different from the already cultural and institutional structures, otherwise.

Sociological institutionalism is a useful theoretical foundation due to its acknowledgement of Europeanization as a process taking place in particular historical, political and sociocultural contexts as well as informal practices, norms and discourses. This being said, this framework is instrumental in analyzing the ways in which the domestic contexts of the selected non-EU countries affect the interpretation, adaptation and influence of European policies related to higher education. With regard to the higher education, sociological institutionalism has the potential to explain how local actors overcome institutional constraints and organize their resources.

One might suggest that the framework of Europeanization largely concentrates on the EU-induced effects on domestic policies. However, the focus of this dissertation is on three selected non-EU countries, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China. Those countries are purposefully selected to represent a range of geopolitical, socioeconomic and institutional contexts intending to provide a varied Europeanization process outside of the EU. Hence, adopting a broader perspective encompassing not only policies coming from the EU is required and the policy transfer framework provides an added value by also examining how policies are transferred across diverse contexts, including between countries and international organizations.

Policy transfer investigates the ways in which policies are borrowed, adapted and applied in various legal contexts, not only in the EU framework. In addition to vertical transfer among states or horizontal transfer within a country, the framework of policy transfer suggests that policy might be also transferred between states and international organizations. Moreover, higher education is one of the policy areas in which the EU does not directly have jurisdiction, despite the fact that it can provide models and frameworks. For this reason, a more comprehensive and complementary perspective, such as policy transfer is required to explain these areas, as well as the processes like Bologna that have not been initiated by the EU itself. The bottom-up approach and sociological institutionalism, on the other hand, adds a more micro and domestic

context-oriented perspective to the policy transfer theoretical framework. It places a strong emphasis on how social actors—such as people, groups, and networks—shape and resist institutional change. It takes into account how these actors, given their particular domestic contexts, interests, and identities, interpret, adopt, and respond to European policies and norms. It goes beyond the top-down or purely structural perspective and offers valuable insights into the ways in which particular socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts shape the perception, negotiation, and implementation of Europeanization. Hence, whereas policy transfer approach explains the actors, mechanisms and drivers of policy convergence, divergence or emulation, bottom-up perspective emphasizes the discursive schemes, societal mobilization and informal networks affecting policy results and alterations.

On the other hand, by encouraging the exchange of best practices and policy ideas among member states, Europeanization may serve as a driving force for the transfer of policies. Since they strive to conform to EU standards and directives, countries may engage in policy transfer. Moreover, policy transfer is a common feature of Europeanization within the EU, since member states adopt accomplished policies from one another and learn from each other's experiences. Formal mechanisms such as directives and regulations as well as informal ones including benchmarking and policy learning can facilitate this intra-European policy transfer process.

Although it is still rare, the multifaceted and interconnected relations between the model of Europeanisation and policy transfer have drawn scholarly attention as well. As asserted by Benson and Jordan (2011), policy transfer research grew rapidly between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s, but it is questionably at a more advanced stage now. Accordingly, rather than being limited to a single field of study, policy transfer is now extensively employed in the analysis of more general phenomena like Europeanization, globalization, and policy innovation (Benson & Jordan, 2011). For instance, Yılmaz (2017) explains this entangled relationship in a way that while the Europeanization approach gives the EU exclusive primacy in the process, the policy transfer perspective provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and explaining all policy processes (Yılmaz, 2017). She underlines those studies centered on the EU introducing it as a platform for transfers and, consequently, as an actor that

helps member, candidate, and neighboring states become more European. In contrast, the policy transfer approach does not prioritize EU-related factors in the policy-making process (Yılmaz, 2017). In the same vein, Ladi (2007) remarks that although the two frameworks deal with similar processes, there have been numerous attempts to draw comparisons between the Europeanization and policy transfer frameworks. Whereas the policy transfer provides more useful framework for situations in which there is no concrete European model, the Europeanization framework is better suited for analyzing situations in which the EU is a major player in the transfer process (Ladi, 2007). Due to the role of the EU in the very definition of Europeanization, it is even claimed by Flockhart (2008) that what is presently considered as Europeanization is referred to as "EU-ization", as a concept firstly coined by Wallace (2000). In this context, Flockhart (2008) states that in practice, most academics define Europeanization either as the impact of the EU at home and/or the impact of member states on the EU itself, which is increasingly suggested as uploading and downloading, nonetheless developed solely around the EU.

From a different angle, Lenz (2006) examines how the EU structures its bioregional relations with Mercosur through policy transfer, arguing that policy transfer is one of the instruments the EU uses to externalize its governance models and Europeanize non-member states or regions. According to Howell (2022) on the other hand, it is critical to distinguish between horizontal and vertical policy transfer when analyzing Europeanization in terms of policy transfer. Vertical policy transfer takes place through EU policy or European integration processes. Adopting and learning from the policies of other member states is a form of horizontal policy transfer that takes place outside of the European Union. This addresses conceptual stretching and provides a framework for Europeanization by implying that policy transfers, even those involving only coordination, must pass through EU institutions in order to be considered Europeanization (Howell, 2002).

Additionally, in her article, Yılmaz (2017) looks into the reasons for the transfer as well as the changes made to Turkish healthcare over the past ten years. She concludes that there were extensive reforms in addition to Europeanizing reforms and the processes of Europeanization were aided by a transfer of health policy. As a

conclusion, Yılmaz (2017) suggests that the existence of such a voluntary process in an EU candidate state that was also Europeanizing in many other areas at the same time, highlights the risk of overly simplistic explanations for domestic change and the need for a more comprehensive approach that looks at a variety of factors rather than just Europeanization dynamics. From this point of view, Yılmaz proposes that the policy transfer perspective may eliminate the methodological risk of attributing domestic policy initiatives to European forces when, in reality, they may have resulted from internal domestic developments or external forces. In other words, the researchers might or might not discover the European factor by following the casual chain at the end.

Nevertheless, some aspects of the Europeanization approach still require further development with additional mediating variables. Several factors determine whether or not the non-compliance between domestic policies, institutions and practices and European processes results in a strong adaptational pressure and significant domestic change, at the end. Therefore, more mediating variables are needed for the European literature to have a stronger explanatory power and it is imperative to provide an explanation for why some states converge towards comparable institutions and policies, while others do not. It is also important to acknowledge the limitation of the Europeanization approach, as it might be difficult to reveal an empirical causal relationship between the process of learning and policy change, especially in policy areas where the soft law prevails.

To conclude, as a transition to the following chapters, it might be better to summarize the theoretical positioning of the study, highlighting how the policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization frameworks are selectively adopted to explore the dynamics of EU higher education policies in non-EU contexts. From the policy transfer framework, the study adopts elements that explain the mechanisms of transfer (voluntary, coercive, or mixed), the roles of various actors (e.g., International Office Professionals, institutional administrators, and national authorities), and the constraints that shape the transfer process (such as structural or institutional challenges). These components are considered to be instrumental in examining how policies are transferred and adapted within the domestic and institutional contexts of

the three selected countries. Furthermore, the framework's flexibility to account for policy transfer beyond EU contexts and its acknowledgment that the EU is not always the sole source of pressure proved particularly relevant for this research, especially in the non-EU settings. From the bottom-up Europeanization framework, several critical aspects are adopted. Its actor-centered approach and focus on the interplay between European and domestic contexts provide a nuanced lens to analyze the agency of IOPs. The framework's emphasis on mediating factors, such as veto players, also helps explain how policies are not only transferred but also reinterpreted and mediated at various levels. However, while the study's focus on EU higher education programs makes Europeanization inherently relevant, the framework is not applied to evaluate the extent to which the studied countries have become "Europeanized." Instead, it serves as a toolkit to interpret interview findings and explain how EU programs are adapted and implemented within diverse domestic contexts.

Finally, it is also critical to mention that while utilizing these theoretical perspectives and analyzing the EU-induced domestic changes in the field of higher education, this dissertation also considers the differences in policy areas and the geographies. This is mostly because, similar to Europe, the degree of Europeanization outside of the EU varies; the EU has distinct relationships and provides different mechanisms and incentives to its members, candidate countries, neighborhood states, ENP countries, OECD countries, Latin America, South East Asia, Africa, which are also differential with regard to the administration and institutional capability, degree of statehood and state capacity, degree of misfit, existence and power of veto players, relationship (symmetrical, asymmetrical) with the EU and so on. In that respect, the People's Republic of China, geographically, culturally and ideologically is alien to the EU but has full capacity; Bosnia and Herzegovina is geographically and culturally more compatible but lacks capacity in institutional, political and economic sense as well as the Republic of Kazakhstan which is almost in between in both senses are chosen as appropriate case studies to examine and compare. With regard to the differences in policy areas on the other hand, it is critical to mention that the field of education and particularly the higher education is already more exposed to international and global developments, due to its universal and competitive nature. Nevertheless, despite the increasing autonomy of HEIs with the help of privatization, they are still embedded in

national contexts and structures. Hence, the role of countries and individual HEIs in this process of policy transfer and Europeanization and the actors who transfer policies are also debatable.

CHAPTER 3

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES AND MECHANISMS OF THE EU

3.1 Introduction

Historically, education and training have remained as a competence of the member states, rather than being an area under the superior authority of the EU. However, despite the lack of competence in the field of education and training, the European Commission has been establishing certain mechanisms and programs. This is to support the internationalization of the European higher education institutions, to increase the appeal of the Europe as a top study destination and to enhance the convergence of the higher education systems in the member states.

In that respect, the objective of this chapter is to understand the development of higher education policies and mechanisms of the EU in the course of time. The chapter will firstly explain the historical background of those policies and programs developed by the EU as well as the other historical developments which have contributed to the higher education policy of the EU in different aspects (e.g. Lisbon Strategy etc.). After the historical background, the chapter will explain different higher education programs run by the EU both inside and outside of its borders. These parts will help us to understand the basic idea behind the creation of these policies and programs, their rules, regulations, the number of participants and the budgets allocated as well as their impact on the EU and non-EU countries.

3.2 Historical Background

Such policy fields like education, training and culture policies are at the core of the today's EU agenda. Even though it is quite difficult to create a harmonized system all

across the EU because of the variety of national systems, legal frameworks, traditions, and ideologies, especially in recent years, education and training started to be greatly emphasized because of its role for economic growth and prosperity. This is mostly because in today's economies, the requirements of the labor market are increasing and changing, and higher education institutions respond to this demand by raising highly skilled human capital. In Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2019, European Commission explains the importance of today's educational policies as follows:

> Education, training, youth work and sport are key to promote common European values, foster social integration, enhance intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community. Well-performing education and training systems and youth policies provide people with skills required by the labor market and the economy (European Commission, 2019).

However, the field of education was not one of the main concerns of the European Coal and Steel Community originally, which was rather designed as an economic and political entity at the beginning. Except the Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome, the field of education was not directly referred by the founding treaties. As a matter of fact, the article 128 was only suggesting a shared vocational training strategy in accordance with the Union's original purpose of common market, rather than establishing a basis for a common education policy. Because of the intergovernmental concerns and the increase of domestic interests (e.g. Empty Chair Crisis 1965, Luxembourg Compromise 1966), there was not any substantial progress during the 1960s either. The field of education started to be emphasized more in the 1970s and the 1980s in line with the objective of creating a European Single Market. Policy makers at the European level started to understand that education was one of the most significant components of economic growth and competitiveness (Dakowska & Serrano-Velarde, 2018). As a result, during 1970s, member states' Ministers for Education started to meet and define the outline of possible cooperation in the field of education for the first time[1].

[1] For details, "Resolution of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council, of 6 June 1974 on cooperation in the field of education", available online at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A41974X0820

Development of European higher education policy was also closely related to the increasing interest in education by other international actors such as the OECD and the World Bank (Dakowska & Serrano-Velarde, 2018). This is actually due to the fact that education was considered as one of the significant components of national economic growth and political stability since the early 1980s. During the 1980s, various programs were initiated in the field of education and training (e.g. Erasmus, Youth for Europe etc.), through which the collaboration among member states in terms of education and the harmonization of the national education policies developed further. Erasmus Program was established in 1987 to further encourage this cooperation among member states and their higher education institutions. The Council Decision 87/327 of 15 June 1987 which adopted the Erasmus Program defined the objectives of the program as follows:

> (i) to achieve a significant increase in the number of students from universities as defined in Article 1 (2) spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, in order that the Community may draw upon an adequate pool of manpower with first-hand experience of economic and social aspects of other Member States, while ensuring equality of opportunity for male and female students as regards participation in such mobility;
> (ii) to promote broad and intensive cooperation between universities in all Member States;
> (iii) to harness the full intellectual potential of the universities in the Community by means of increased mobility of teaching staff, thereby improving the quality of the education and training provided by the universities with a view to securing the competitiveness of the Community in the world market;
> (iv) to strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe;
> (v) to ensure the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level (European Council, 1987).

As it could be understood from the objectives above, the Program was aiming to achieve its targets not only on the individual level (students and staff) but also on the institutional (higher education institutions), sectorial, national and European levels. On the one hand, the Program was aiming to increase the quality of the education and to encourage the collaboration between higher education institutions as well as the economic and social sectors at the national and Community level. On the other hand, one of the objectives was to increase the number of young Europeans and graduates that have lived in other member states and being familiar with their economic and social structures. Through this way, the program was aiming to increase the interaction among economic and social sectors of different member states as well as between

European citizens. This also suggests that Erasmus experience is kind of a civic exercise to enhance the mutual trust and European identity among citizens.

As a part of the latter attempts, Article 126 of Treaty of Maastricht which came into force in 1992 defined the Union's competency in the field of education clearly for the first time. Article 126 explained that the Union would have a supporting role, rather than an exclusive or shared competence in the field of education. In that regard, the Union would support the collaboration of the member states and offer activities and programs to improve the quality of the education, but it would also respect the sovereignty of the member states in terms of their national educational systems.

In the following years, the Erasmus Program became part of several other programs. Between the years of 1995 and 1999, Erasmus was under the Socrates I Program and it became part of the Socrates II Program between 2000 and 2006. After the decision of the European Parliament and the Council on 15 November 2006 and the introduction of Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) for the period of 2007-2013, LLP was established as an umbrella program composed of several programs and initiatives like Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtivg etc. In the latter periods, Erasmus+ Program was adopted by the European Commission for the period of 2014-2020 as a new and single umbrella program including any Erasmus-kind initiatives. As it can be seen in the historical development of the Program, in most of the cases, the Erasmus was incorporated into the larger framework or umbrella programs like Socrates, LLP or Erasmus+. This can be interpreted in a way that through such umbrella programs, the Union was aiming to increase its visibility in wider sectors as well as thematic areas of education and to create synergies between different programs and educational sectors (Teichler, 2002). For instance, the new Erasmus+ initiative, as a new catch-all framework program, combines all the EU's current schemes for education, training, youth and sport including LLP, Youth in Action and five other programs like Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa etc. According to the report "The Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility", through the merger of the individual program structures under framework programs, the administrative load required for the management of each individual program was also reduced (Bracht, et al., 2006). Lastly, the participant countries as well as the spectrum of activities have been

gradually broadened in each stage of the framework programs. For instance, in 1997 (Socrates I), the mobility for academic staff was introduced; while with the initiation of the LLP Program, some other actions like student traineeship and mobility for administrative staff were introduced. The participant countries and the initiation of new activities can be seen in the table below in a chronological order.

In the meantime, the competency of the Union in the field of education was re-defined with the Lisbon Treaty (2009). Article 2E of the Lisbon Treaty defined the Union's authority in the related field as follows:

> "The Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be:
> a) protection and improvement of human health;
> b) industry;
> c) culture;
> d) tourism;
> e) education, vocational training, youth and sport;
> f) civil protection;
> g) administrative cooperation" (European Union, 2007).

Table 3.1 Introduction of New Actions and New Members in Erasmus Program.

1987	Erasmus Program launched the first exchange of just over 3000 students between 11 member states (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK)
1988	Luxembourg joins Erasmus
1992	Six countries join the Program (Austria, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland)
1994	Liechtenstein joins Erasmus
1996	Introduction of Erasmus Intensive Language Courses
1997	Erasmus teacher exchanges introduced
1998	Six Central and Eastern European countries join the Program (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia)
1999	Six Central and Eastern European countries join the Program (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia)
2000	Malta joins Erasmus
2002	Celebration of the One Millionth Erasmus Student

Table 3.1 Introduction of New Actions and New Members in Erasmus Program (Continued).

2003	Erasmus University Charter introduced
2004	Turkiye joins Erasmus
2007	Start of the LLP Program with new actions introduced to Erasmus, such as student traineeships and staff training
2009	Celebration of the Two Millionth Erasmus student and Croatia joints the Program
2012/13	Three Millionth Erasmus Student
2014	Launch of new Erasmus+ for all Programs

Source: Erasmus Changing Lives Opening Minds for 25 Years, European Union (2012).

During 2000s, the EU's role in higher education gained greater significance, particularly through initiatives like the Lisbon Strategy and the subsequent Europe 2020 Strategy, which aimed to position Europe as the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy (Garben, 2012). In its official website, European Commission clearly indicates that "the aim of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion" (European Commission, 2018). The Lisbon Strategy adopted in 2000 was aiming to create competitive, well-functioning and efficient markets and favorable conditions for growth. Planned reforms such as reducing transaction and transaction costs for companies were meant to increase the attractiveness of Europe to invest in, to do business in and, ultimately, to create prosperity. Moreover, one of the key targets of the Strategy was to facilitate the transition towards a knowledge-driven economy, in which education and training, research and innovation contribute efficiently to growth (Ivan-Ungureanu & Marcu, 2006). The Lisbon Agenda was kind of turning point for the European higher education policies, priorities and mechanisms, because it has paved the way for the establishment of a genuine EU policy agenda by emphasizing the significance of the higher education for economic growth (Dakowska & Serrano-Velarde, 2018).

In 2010, Lisbon Strategy was re-introduced after the financial crisis as the new Europe 2020 Strategy. The Europe 2020 Strategy adopted by the European Council on 17 June 2010 as the successor of the Lisbon Strategy is the EU's agenda for growth and jobs, for the current decade. It must be noted that the Strategy has an economic agenda as it was designed to meet the rapidly changing world and make the European economy fit for the future with higher productivity and employment. The Europe 2020 Strategy was aiming to realize three mutually reinforcing priorities; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth with the following EU headline targets as well as seven flagship initiatives put forward by the Commission to facilitate each priority:

- "75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed,
- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D,
- The "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met, including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right,
- The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree,
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty "[2].

As it can be understood from the priorities above, the Europe 2020 Strategy is closely related with higher education policies, mostly because of its priority to have at least 40% of the young Europeans having a tertiary degree. Moreover, one of the seven flagship initiatives- "youth on the move to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labor market"-is directly related with the mobility programs funded by the EU. The aim of the regarding initiative is to raise the overall quality and performance of education in the EU as well as increasing the attractiveness of European higher education institutions (European Commission, 2010).

In the following years, the Union presented an updated reform agenda- "Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education" in 2017 and underlined the importance of higher education for sustained growth and employment as well as for highly skilled work force as follows.

[2] For details, "Europe 2020: the European Union Strategy for Growth and Employment", available online at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/europe-2020-the-european-union-strategy-for-growth-and-employment.html

> "Higher education plays a unique role. Demand for highly skilled, socially engaged people both increasing and changing. High-level skills gaps already exist. Driven by digital technologies, jobs are becoming more flexible and complex. Without higher education institutions and systems that are effective in education, research and innovation and are connected to their societies, Europe cannot respond to those challenges (European Commission, 2017)".

Additionally, in the Rome Declaration of March 2017, EU leaders declared their intention to work towards "a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity (European Commission, 2018)." Moreover, in the Gothenburg Summit (November 2017), education and culture became one of the main agendas of the debate and the Commission established its vision for European Education Area as follows.

> "A Europe in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders; a continent where spending time in another member state-to study, to learn or to work-has become the standard and where, in addition to one's mother tongue, speaking two other languages has become the norm; a continent in which people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity (European Commission, 2018)".

As it can be understood from the historical background, with time, the EU has played an increasingly important and complementary role with the programs explained above and the developments that will be described in the following parts. Even though the member states have the primary responsibility for education, culture and training, European higher education policies have developed further, because they have complemented the economic project in terms of educating the future workforce of Europe as well as raising European-minded citizens. Although European-level cooperation in education is based on voluntary collaboration, the education policies of member states have increasingly aligned with EU strategies. The Europe 2020 Strategy and the Bologna Program have significantly contributed to this alignment (Garben, 2012). Despite the EU's limited authority to enforce regulations in higher education, countries have demonstrated a strong commitment to incorporating European policy frameworks into their national systems, particularly through initiatives like the Bologna Process.

In today's policies, the EU still has a powerful educational strategy especially with the help of its new governance methods such as OMC. The OMC works in a way that it establishes common policy objectives for certain countries, monitor national progress constantly and disseminate the good practices. This method provides guidelines and timetables for national and regional level actions, uses qualitative and quantitative indicators as well as disseminating best practices, period-monitoring and peer reviews (Radaelli, 2003). The OMC seems to offer a middle way, as the EU formulates policy objectives, but the authority of the member states is still maintained, because it does not have formal and legally binding sanctions. However, it must be noted that the increasing commitment does not mean that countries aim to achieve homogenization of higher education system (Litjens, 2005), which will be discussed in the later parts in a more detailed way.

3.3 EU Higher Education Programs and Mechanisms

As discussed in the previous parts, even though the policy fields such as education and training were not at the center on the EU agenda since the very beginning, the EU has started be a significant and effective actor in terms of higher education policies of the European countries. In time, with the help of its higher education programs, the EU has become an influential actor for the non-European countries as well. The latter parts will present the analysis of the higher education programs offered by the European Commission not only for EU members but also non-EU countries. The historical schema of the programs could be seen in the table below.

First of all, there will be a short analysis of the Erasmus program, as the most widespread and widely known programs of the EU which has an impact on the billions of young Europeans. Considering that around 13 million beneficiaries have been participating in the program since its establishment in 1987, the effect of the program becomes more prominent. Moreover, the latter parts will explain the Bologna Process as one of the ambitious, far-reaching, and transformative reform processes in the higher education which was aiming to create European Higher Education Area with the help of significant reforms in the national educational policies. In addition to intra-

European higher education programs, the following parts will also analyze the EU programs offered for the non-EU countries as well.

Table 3.2 Historical Schema of the Higher Education Programs Offered by the EU.

YEAR	COVERAGE	
	EU Range	Wider EU Range (applicable also to non-EU countries)
1987	Introduction of Erasmus Program	
1990-1994		Tempus I Program
1994-2000		Tempus II Program
1995-1999	Erasmus Program was part of the Socrates I Program	
1999	Bologna Process	
2000-2006	Erasmus Program was part of the Socrates II Program	Tempus III Program
2003		Introduction of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree
2007-2013	Lifelong Learning Program became an umbrella program including various initiatives and sub programs such as Erasmus	Tempus IV Program
2014-2020	Erasmus+ was introduced as a new single umbrella program	Erasmus+ ICM Program
2021-2027	Erasmus+ with a new and strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions and civic engagements	

Source: Author's own analysis.

The programs like Tempus, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree and Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility will be explained as the examples of the EU's engagement with non-EU countries in the field of higher education. These programs will be also presented as an example of the expansion of the European higher education policies and the EU's influence on non-EU countries as well as the adoption and transfer of intra-European programs into a new dynamic. Those programs offered for non-EU countries were not something completely new, rather the EU adopted the

already existing mechanisms. In respect to this, these programs offered for the EU and non-EU countries were kind of complementary and they were re-adopted with the renewed conditions and dynamics in different time periods and geographical scopes. The programs offered by the European Commission for the EU and non-EU countries were also supplementary in the sense that while some of them were solely focusing on students/staff mobility, the others were having objectives in terms of capacity building or joint master projects. Thus, these programs were supplementary not only in geographical sense, but also in terms of the scopes and objectives.

In terms of the EU's engagement with non-EU countries in the realm of higher education, the European Commission has an active policy for cooperation in education with non-EU countries, which is promoted as follows.

> "In particular, collaboration between universities both within and outside the Union helps to attract the best talent in higher education to the EU, and to promote peer learning and international comparison…Furthermore, international cooperation in this field supports innovation and job creation in the EU by enabling skills mobility across countries…More than this, international cooperation in the field of higher education is an effective tool for bolstering the EU's public diplomacy efforts around the world. It acts to encourage support for EU policies beyond the Union's borders, notably those in the fields of enlargement and the neighborhood, international development, migration and intercultural dialogue…"[3].

The higher education programs conducted with non-EU countries contribute to the improvement of curricula, teaching and learning quality as well as university governances in those countries. However, as it can be understood from the priorities above, through its cooperation with non-EU countries in the field of higher education, the EU also aims to increase the attractiveness and visibility of the EU as a center of education and to enhance the overall quality and internationalization of European higher education institutions as well as promoting values and interests of the EU.

[3] For details, "European Higher Education in the World, why is international cooperation important in higher education?" available online at https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/eea-in-the-world/european-higher-education-in-the-world

As it will be explained in the later part, only 3 years after the establishment of the Erasmus program for intra-European mobility, the Tempus was developed to be conducted with other regions such as Western Balkans, Central Asia, North America and so on. Consequently, it could be argued that almost since the beginning, there has been an emphasis on cooperation between higher education institutions not only within the EU but also beyond the borders. This was also closely related with the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) of the EU. It is clear that, a strong and educated human capital is a crucial factor for a common space of stability and prosperity between the EU and its neighbors, which the EU is trying to build through its ENP (European Commission, 2016). Higher education plays a significant role in terms of fostering collaboration among the EU and its neighbors. Almost all of the countries that are part of the EU's ENP (e.g. Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia etc.) are also part of at least one of its higher education programs. In one of its communication documents, the EU also confirms the role of the education in its ENP as follows: "Educational and youth exchanges must be a core element of the ENP, just as such exchanged have helped to build bridges and overcome prejudices within the EU (European Union, 2006)."

Considering the discussion above, it could be suggested that collaboration with non-EU countries in the field of higher education has been emphasized in parallel with the developments of intra-European mobility and higher education programs. However, with time, the number of programs offered by the EU and their geographical scope have enlarged to a great extent. As it will be explained in the later parts, in the following years, the European Commission established new sorts of programs like Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility that were more comprehensive and ambitious in geographical sense.

Moreover, with the impact of the knowledge-economy, the nature of the higher education has changed not only in Europe but also in the global arena. Especially since the second half of the 1990s, there has been a gradual shift from political to economic motivations for the internationalization of higher education. As a result, the main focus of the programs has mostly shifted to the objectives related with the requirements of being the most competitive knowledge economy. International student recruitment,

preparing graduates for the global labor market, attracting global talent for the knowledge economy and so on have become the important pillars of the higher education strategies (European Union, 2015). The education systems all around the world started to feel the pressure not only to increase the number of people having formal education, but also re-shape their education in line with the requirements of the global economy. Higher education institutions were expected to raise different kinds of generations who were flexible, adaptable, and mobile and would be able to work creatively with knowledge (Rizvi, 2017). As a result, universities were considered as a key component of the economic strategy whose curricula need to be aligned with corporate needs and requirements as well as entrepreneurship (Mercille & Murphy, 2015). As the official processes such as Lisbon Agenda, Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education and Rome Declaration suggest, with the impact of the economic policy, the field of higher education started to be emphasized more in the EU agenda as well. Higher education policies started to be considered as the complementary of the economic project because of their impact on the future and highly skilled workforce required by the flexible and complex job market as well as the sustainable growth.

3.3.1 Intra-European Erasmus Program (1987)

The name of the Erasmus Program, the acronym of the "European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students" comes from the name of the prominent philosopher Desiderius Erasmus. As the most comprehensive, widespread and well-known flagship program of the EU, Erasmus Program includes various types of initiatives for higher education, schools, vocational education, adult education etc. For the field of the higher education, the Program enables students to study in one of the higher education institutions in any of the program countries for one or two semesters. The Erasmus provides monthly grants for beneficiaries who are also exempt from paying a tuition fee within the framework of the bilateral agreements between the higher education institutions acquiring Erasmus University Charter. In addition to student mobility for studying (the most common activity of the program), Erasmus also offers monthly and daily grants for traineeship activities and the activities of staff

mobility for teaching and training, as well as newly designed sub-programs such as short-term doctoral mobility and Blended Intensive Program (BIP). The program is available for all disciplines/departments and academic levels.

Erasmus Program is coordinated by the European Commission at the European level as well as the national agencies in participating countries at the national level. The program currently includes 34 program countries (28 EU member states as well as North Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Türkiye). As a result of the referendum of 23 June 2016 in which 51.9% of voters chose to leave the EU, changes and new practices occurred for the position of the UK especially after 2019. Similarly, as of January 2019 onwards, the status of the Republic of Serbia changed, and it became a full member of the Erasmus program and one of the program countries.

The Erasmus Program was initiated in 1987 and 3244 students from 11 countries participated in the program in its first year. As it can be seen in the tables and figures below, since the beginning of the program, the number of participants as well as the budget of the program have increased steadily.

Table 3.3 Erasmus Budgets in Different Project Periods.

2007-2013 (LLP Period)	3.1 billion EUR (3 million participants)
2014-2020 (Erasmus+ Period)	14. 79 billion EUR (4 million participants)
2021-2027 (Erasmus+ Period)	Estimated budget of 26.2 billion EUR, which is nearly doubling the funding compared to 2014-2020 & 12 million beneficiaries are expected to participate in the Program

Source: Author's own analysis.

These figures once again confirm that Erasmus is one of the most widespread and widely known programs of the EU which affects the lives of billions of citizens. The familiarity of European citizens with Erasmus Program is also proven by the results of Eurobarometer surveys. For instance, the results of the Eurobarometer survey organized in Autumn 2016 show that 53% of European citizens have heard of the

Erasmus Program and the respondents see the "student exchange programs such as Erasmus" as one of the most positive achievements of the EU (European Commission, 2016). Moreover, Flash Eurobarometer survey conducted in April 2018 demonstrates that 90% of the young respondents (aged 15 to 30 in all member states) think that it is important to have an experience abroad; in fact, nearly half of the respondents (45%) think that it is actually very important.

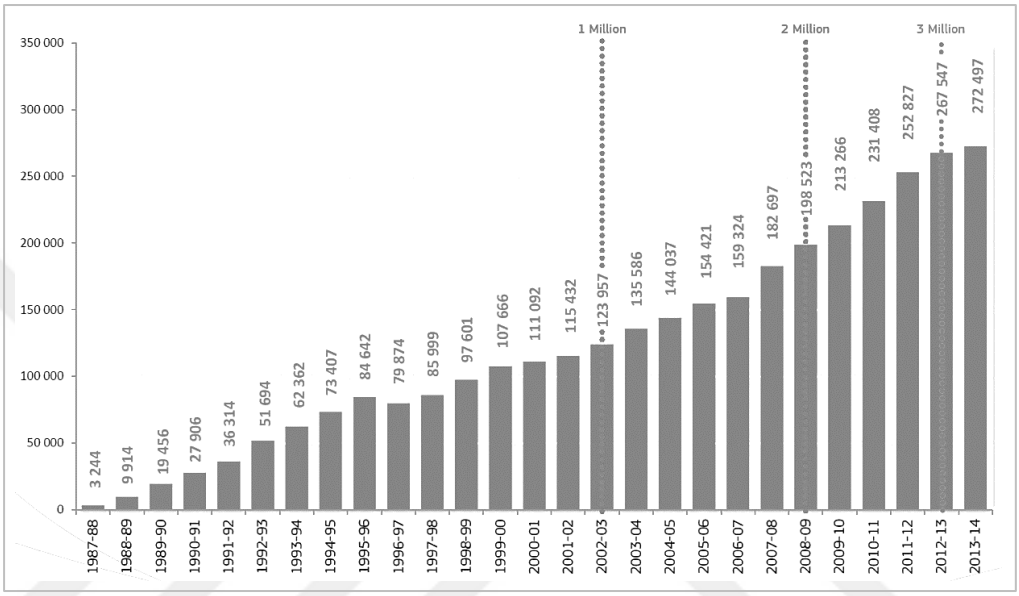


Figure 3.1 Growth in Student Mobility Since the Start of the Erasmus Program.

Source: Erasmus Facts, Figures and Trends, European Commission (2015).

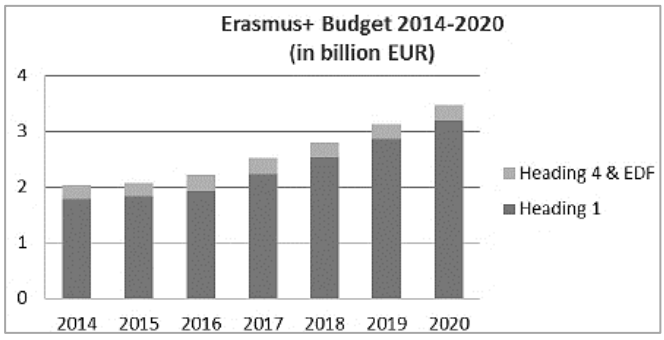


Figure 3.2 Erasmus+ Budget 2014-2020.

Source: Erasmus+ Programme Annual Report 2014, European Commission (2015).

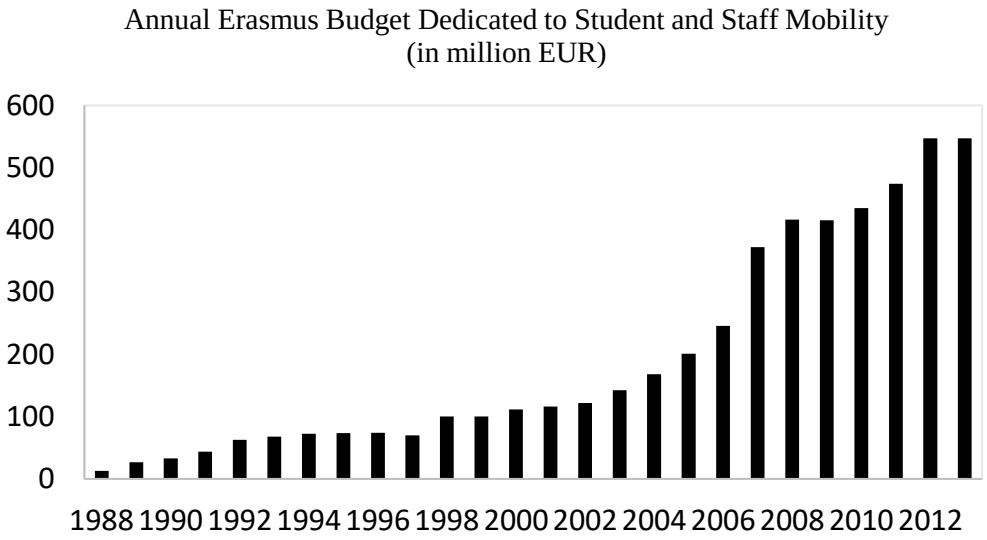


Figure 3.3 Erasmus Decentralized Funds Allocated to National Agencies.

Source: Erasmus Programme in 2011-2012: The Figures Explained, European Commission (2013).

Since its beginning, the Erasmus Program has been offered as a mechanism for various objectives like the promotion of European identity, improvement of certain competencies and opportunities for future career and personal development as well as the transfer of technology and information among member states (Psychogyiou, 2015). In general, the Program aims to create a European Higher Education Area, to encourage academic cooperation and mobility of higher education students and staff and sustainable development of partner countries in the field of higher education, to increase participants' employability with abilities acquired during their mobility period and to promote a feeling of European identity among students. There is a growing literature about the impact of the program and this literature basically focuses on its impacts in terms of the European identity as well as the personal/professional skills and employability of the participants. This alignment is also tied to the economic agenda, as harmonized systems across countries facilitate the creation of a European Higher Education Area and enhance the continent's competitiveness by aligning curricula with the demands of businesses and the knowledge economy. Establishing a unified European Higher Education system would also help produce more graduates equipped with the competencies and skills needed by the European labor market and

the knowledge-driven economy. Since its establishment, the Erasmus Program has helped to provide young Europeans with the education, skills and competences required by the labor market. In that sense, different reports prepared by the EU (e.g. Erasmus Impact Study Regional Analysis, European Commission 2016) suggest that compare to non-mobile ones, mobile students have higher chances to find a job one year after their graduation. However, with the introduction of traineeship activity in 2007, the Program created stronger links with the labor market, as it started to enable students to make traineeship in companies and organizations and prepare young citizens for the requirement of job market. It is indicated in the fact sheet of the European Commission that one in three students who do traineeship abroad is offered a position by their host company after their graduation (European Commission, 2017).

3.3.2 Tempus Program (1990)

One of the first and well-known examples of the programs applicable to the non-EU countries is the Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies (TEMPUS) which was established in 1990. Tempus was the EU's main and initial external cooperation program which was covering 28 partner countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Western Balkans, North Africa and Middle East, in addition to EU members and program countries.

Table 3.4 Tempus Program Partner Countries.

Western Balkan Countries	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia
Countries from Eastern Neighborhood and Central Asia	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan
Countries from North Africa and Middle East	Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza Strip and Israel

Source: Author's own analysis.

As mentioned earlier, the program was established just 3 years after the announcement of the Erasmus program. It was not a completely and solely new mechanism, rather the re-adoption of the already existing Erasmus mechanism with an expansion to the non-EU countries in accordance with the renewed requirements. So, historically speaking, there was some kind of smooth transition between the programs offered by the European Commission for the EU and non-EU countries.

The first period of the Program was organized between 1990 and 1994 and it was followed by the following periods: Tempus II (1994-2000), Tempus III (2000-2006) and Tempus IV (2007-2013). Tempus was replaced by the Erasmus+ Program in 2014 and Tempus-like activities such as capacity building projects became part of this new initiative. The program was composed of three actions including joint projects for the exchange of knowledge and know how, structural measures for the development of educational institutions and systems as well as the accompanying measures for dissemination of the educational outcomes.

The program mainly aimed to reform and modernize the higher education institutions and systems in the partner countries. Tempus program was primarily established to facilitate the process of transition and reform in the higher education systems of partner countries as well as to strengthen structured cooperation and joint projects between higher education institutions, civil society, mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue (European Commission, 2008). The program created main achievements especially in the areas of implementation of curriculum reforms; introduction of new fields of study and new methods of designing courses; establishment of necessary equipment for communications and laboratories; reform of higher education structures and university governance; quality assurance and so on. For example, in Uzbekistan, Tempus became quite effective in terms of the introduction of the two-level higher education system, development of quality assurance systems, introduction and incorporation of Bologna criteria and the establishment of large number of training laboratories (Abdurakhmanova, 2014). Since 1994, more than 87 Tempus projects have been funded in Uzbekistan and most of those projects focused on curriculum development and introduction of new majors such in the area of engineering,

technology, applied sciences, education, social sciences, management and business in line with local labor market's needs (Abdurakhmanova, 2014). Similarly, 49% of higher education institutions in Georgia became part of the Tempus projects. Within the framework of Tempus, new study programs and new professions (e.g. social workers, information science specialists etc.) have been developed in Georgia. Tempus has also contributed to the implementation of modern teaching and learning methods as well as the development of curricula and quality assurance in Georgia (National Tempus Office Georgia, 2014).

3.3.3 Bologna Process (1999)

Beyond the aforementioned developments, the Bologna Process has played a significant role in reshaping European and global higher education institutions while fostering greater collaboration among them. The basic principles of the Bologna Process go back to the Sorbonne Declaration signed by the education ministers of France, Germany, Italy and the UK on 25 May 1998. The Sorbonne Declaration was aiming to establish convergence towards a common framework qualifications and cycles; to enlarge and support the mobility of students and academic staff as well as to introduce a common degree level system (Crosier & Parveva, 2013)[4]. One year later (1999), the Bologna Declaration was signed by higher education ministers from 29 European countries, with the initial goal of establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010 through the creation of equivalent degrees and harmonized, comparable education systems. The basic objective was to make European Higher Education more compatible, comparable, competitive and attractive both for Europeans and the students and scholars of other countries as well as to promote the employability of the European citizens. Different and fragmented education systems throughout the Europe were making difficult for Europeans to use their qualifications received from one country in their job applications in another state. The compatibility among the

[4] For details, "Sorbonne Joint Declaration on Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System" available online at: http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/1998_Sorbonne/61/2/1998_Sorbonne_Declaration_English_552612.pdf

educational systems of the countries would make it easier for the citizens to seek job in other countries. Moreover, the emergence of the Bologna Process at the beginning of the new millennium was not a coincidence, considering that the increasing pressure on the higher education systems to meet new societal demands and the shift towards knowledge-based economies which brought higher education center stage (Crosier & Parveva, 2013). In that sense, the Process was also aiming to support the modernization of education systems which would meet the demands of changing labor market requiring high skills, innovation and entrepreneurship.

To summarize, the principal aims agreed in the Bologna Declaration were as follows:

- "Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees,
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate,
- Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility,
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
  for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
  for teachers, researchers and administrative staff
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies,
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, interinstitutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research" (Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education, 1999).

In the official website of the European Commission, it is also stated that the main focus of the Bologna Process is the "introduction of the three-cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate); strengthened quality assurance and easier recognition of qualifications"[5]. The process has principles and guidelines not only for public authorities but variety of actors including higher education institutions, academic staff, students, employers' quality assurance agencies, international organizations and so on. The signatories of the Bologna Accord could be seen in the table below.

Today, 48 countries (both EU and non-EU) are the signatory of the Bologna Declaration, which makes the process the most far-reaching and ambitious reforms of

[5] For details, "The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area", available online at https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/bologna-process

higher education (Botonero, 2013). As it could be seen in the table, not only EU members but also non-EU countries are part of the Bologna Process; in fact, it now stretches from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Actually, membership has expanded beyond the geographic borders of Europe which revealed the question to how far the borders of European Higher Education Area may grow. Consequently, in a geographic stance, the European Higher Education Area cannot be considered a uniquely European initiative at the current stage (WENR, World Education News+Reviews, 2007).

Table 3.5 Signatory Countries of the Bologna Accord.

1999	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK
2001	Croatia, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Turkiye, European Commission
2003	Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Vatican City
2005	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine
2007	Montenegro
2010	Kazakhstan
2015	Belarus

Source: Author's own compilation.

The results of the process show that the Bologna Process has become the most important and transformative reform process in the history of global higher education, since all the signatory countries have undertaken significant reforms into their higher education systems and implementations (Crosier & Parveva, 2013). Influenced by the Bologna Process and the Erasmus Program, European countries have restructured their degree systems and adapted their teaching and quality assurance methods to align with a shared qualifications framework (Tamtik, 2017). This structural alignment of European higher education systems, driven by the Bologna Process, also sought to enhance Europe's global competitiveness in line with the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and the subsequent Europe 2020 Strategy (Garben, 2012). The harmonization of educational systems contributes to a common European strategy and facilitates the

economic agenda by putting the universities as key components of the sustainable economic strategy in line with the corporate needs and requirements.

With the help of the Bologna Process, substantial changes and extensive reforms have occurred in national higher education systems of the signatory states (e.g. degree structures and curricula designs) and they harmonized their practices in line with a common agenda, which implies a top-down approach. However, it is difficult to define Bologna as a pure top-down process either. As explained before, the EU does not have an exclusive authority in the field of education; rather it only has supportive competency and must respect member states' authority, national educational systems as well as cultural and linguistic diversity. In line with this argument, especially until the Bologna Declaration, member states were also emphasizing the diversity of national education systems as the reflection of historical traditions and heritages. The Bologna Declaration was a groundbreaking attempt in the sense that national authorities were willing to create compatible and comparable systems in the European area of higher education by themselves in order to increase the competitiveness of the European system. At the beginning of the process, the EU bodies did not take part of the Declaration, which once again shows that it was a nation-based action. The EU has been an official member of the Bologna Process in 2001 and received the voting right in 2005. However, in the following years, the European Commission became part of the action and some of its practices like European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) started to be important mechanisms used in the process.

Depending on this discussion, it may be more convenient to evaluate the Bologna as a national bottom-up process, rather than the EU top-down progression (Müller & Kogan, 2010). Nevertheless, the process was still quite significant in terms of the cooperation and restructuring of higher education institutions and practices as well as the increasing role and mechanisms of the EU in the field of education. It is also obvious that the EU has been an effective actor in the later processes by providing necessary funds and mechanisms; in fact, with time it started to be difficult to differentiate the EU policies and intergovernmental actions in the realm of European Higher Education Area (Dakowska & Serrano-Velarde, 2018). It should be underlined that although it was an intergovernmental and bottom-up process, the objectives of the

Bologna Process were very close to the EU's educational and economic policies published in the Lisbon Strategy. In the Commission's report on the Bologna Process, the EU also confirms that its programs for higher education and the Bologna Process are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing (European Commission, 2018). In line with its desire to be the most competitive knowledge-economy in the world, the EU helped to fund the process in the later years of the Declaration. As the importance and complexity of the process increased, the Council of Europe could not maintain its leadership role because of lack of material and administrative courses. As a result, this need for an efficient leadership was filled by the EU and it has been the unofficial leader and the main source of funding of the process (Zahavi & Friedman, 2019). In its 2018 report, the European Commission also indicates that almost 20 years later, the EU continues to be a leading player in supporting countries to drive the Bologna Process, by providing support the Secretariat and Ministerial Conferences. Moreover, the report states that the EU's work to support higher education reports, mobility activities, Erasmus+ program and cooperation projects and common tools (e.g. ECTS) helps countries achieve many of the key commitments of the Bologna Process (European Commission, 2018).

3.3.4 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMD) (2003)

One of the other examples of EU's higher education programs conducted with non-EU countries is the Erasmus Mundus Program, which was established with the Decision 2317/2003/EC (EC 2003), "Establishing a Programme for the Enhancement of Quality in Higher Education and the Promotion of Intercultural Understanding through Cooperation with Third Countries (Erasmus Mundus 2004 to 2008)".

Erasmus Mundus Program which started in 2004 as a join master's degree program has offered more than 900 scholarships for around 14000 European and non-European students. EMJMD is an integrated study program composed of 60, 90 or 120 credits provided by the joint program of higher education institutions from different countries. Upon the successful completion of the joint EMJMD, the beneficiaries are awarded with either a joint degree or multiple degrees and diplomas issued by two institutions

from different program countries. In order to have these decrees, the beneficiaries need to study in at least two program countries. If there is a partner country involved, a certain part of the study can also take place in a partner country. Erasmus Mundus program brings institutions together from not only Europe (EU members as well as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Türkiye) but also from other regions of the world (Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership Countries, Southern Mediterranean Countries, Russian Federation, Asia, Central Asia, Latin America etc.) (European Commission, 2019). In the Decision 2317/2003/EC (EC 2003), European Parliament indicates the objectives of the Program as follows:

- "To promote a quality offer in higher education with a distinct European added value, attractive both within the EU and beyond its borders
- To encourage and enable highly qualified graduates and scholars from all over the world, to obtain qualifications and/or experience in the EU
- To develop more structured cooperation between EU and third-country institutions and greater EU outgoing mobility as part of European study program
- To improve accessibility and enhance the profile and visibility of higher education in the EU" (European Parliament, 2003).

As it can be understood from the objectives above, EMJMD is one of the mechanisms developed to increase the attractiveness of the EU as a top study and research destination. Like TEMPUS, EMJMD was another example of the historical transition and evolution of the EU's higher education programs and re-adoption and transfer of the already existing mechanisms with an expansion to the non-EU countries in accordance with the renewed requirements and conditions.

On the other hand, there are a number of articles seeing the EU higher education programs as a soft power tool that could be used to affect the global political agenda, to appeal the attractiveness of the Europe and to spread its values. In line with this argument, the results of the Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey show that according to about one in four graduates, the greatest effect of the program was on their attitude towards Europe and the EU (Chia Sheng-Kai, 2015). The same survey argues that Erasmus Mundus Program provides a chance not only for EU citizens but also for students all around the world to gain these values of Europe; with the help of the program, students from the world know Europe, its culture and citizens (European Commission, 2014).

3.3.5 Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Program (2015)

Even though the EU has already conducted the programs with non-EU countries such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus to increase the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area, appeal of the Europe was still in need to be further promoted because of the increasing competition to make the Europe top destination for higher education against other regions (Botonero, 2013). As a result, one of the most recent and comprehensive higher education programs of the EU- Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Program (ICM) has been designed. The European Commission has been coordinating ICM program since 2015 as a newly designed mechanism to be more global and more integrated than ever before. As it can be seen in the table below, in addition to EU members and program countries, various partner countries from 14 different regions became part of the ICM program. The countries that had already been part of the Tempus participate in the ICM program as well; however, ICM is more comprehensive and ambitious in geographical sense. In that respect, it is quite interesting to see that with the help of the ICM program, even those countries which do not have a membership perspective in their future become part of the EU programs and voluntarily transfer EU regulations into their higher education systems.

Table 3.6 Erasmus+ ICM Program Partner Countries.

Region 1 (Western Balkans)	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro
Region 2 (Eastern Partnership Countries)	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Territory of Ukraine as recognized by international law
Regions 3 (South-Mediterranean Countries)	Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia
Region 4 (Russian Federation)	Territory of Russia as recognized by international law
Region 5 (Asia)	a) Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam

With the introduction of the ICM program, it is now possible for the higher education students of program/partner countries to study in higher education institution in another program/partner country one or two semesters. The program offers high amount of scholarship for student mobility as well as the activities of staff mobility for teaching and training. The rules of both intra-European Erasmus+ program and ICM program are basically same in terms of the announcement and selection of the participants, recognition procedures, inter-institutional agreements among HEIs, procedures for grant payments and so on.

Table 3.6 Erasmus+ ICM Program Partner Countries (Continued).

	b) High income countries and territories: Brunei, Hong Kong, Japan, Republic of Korea, Macao, Singapore and Taiwan
Region 6 (Central Asia)	Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Region 7 (Middle East)	a) Iran, Iraq, Yemen b) High income countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates
Region 8 (Pacific)	a) Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu b) High income countries: Australia, New Zealand
Region 9 (Sub-Saharan Africa)	Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Congo - Democratic Republic of the, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Region 10 (Latin America)	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela
Region 11 (Caribbean)	Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago
Region 12 (US and Canada)	United States of America, Canada
Region 13	Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City State
Region 14	Faroe Islands, Switzerland, UK

Source: Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2024).

Similar to intra-European Erasmus+ Program, ICM program also aims to enhance the competences, employability, and personal development of the participants. However, in addition to these general objectives, ICM program also specifically aims to increase the attractiveness of higher education in Europe and to support higher education institutions to compete on a global scale. The main objective of the newly designed ICM program can be explained with the following quotation:

> "Europe remains an attractive destination for mobile learners with a stable share of around 45% of the internationally mobile student population. Nevertheless, if European higher education institutions want to continue to be the number one destination against a background of increasing competition from Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, they must act strategically to capitalize on Europe's reputation for top quality higher education" (European Commission, European Higher Education in the World, 2013).

By looking at these objectives, Program's expansion the non-European regions in such a comprehensive scope can be analyzed with an economic and political agenda which aims to appeal the Europe as a top study and research destinations for foreign students and staff. As it can be understood from the objectives of the Program, in its relations with the third countries, there is a clear drive to enhance the attractiveness and appeal of European higher education as well as Europe in general. However, as a limitation of this study, it should be noted that there are not yet many studies about the quantity, rates, and effects of the ICM program, because the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ program period has not ended yet.

3.4 Conclusion of the Chapter

To conclude, despite the fact that the EU does not have a clear and superior competence in the field of education, with the help of its mechanisms and programs, it has been quite effective in the higher education policies not only for EU members, but also for non-EU countries. This part of the thesis shows us that mechanisms of the EU vary from regular Erasmus program established in 1987 and the Bologna Process aiming to create European Higher Education Area to the programs offered for non-EU countries such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. Throughout time, the number of programs coordinated by the EU as well as their geographical scope have expanded in

a more comprehensive and ambitious manner. Especially with its newly designed Erasmus+ ICM Program, more than 120 partner countries from 14 different regions (even those countries which do not have a perspective of membership in their future strategy) agreed to transfer EU regulations by becoming part of this program.

These programs and mechanisms were quite effective, considering the increasing number of participants and budgets as well as the member states. In fact, more than 13 million beneficiaries have been participating only in Erasmus program since 1987; while EMJMD has offered more than 900 scholarships for around 14000 European and non-European students. Moreover, while the intra-European Erasmus program includes 33 program countries; 48 countries from the Pacific to the Atlantic are the signatory of the Bologna Declaration which expanded the European Higher Education beyond the geographical borders of the Europe. Similarly, TEMPUS involves 28 partner countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Western Balkans, North Africa and Middle East, in addition to EU members and program countries; while EMJMD brings together not only 33 program countries but also other regions of the world like Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership Countries, Southern Mediterranean Countries, Russian Federation, Asia, Central Asia, Latin America etc. Lastly, as one of the most comprehensive programs of the EU in geographical scope, Erasmus+ ICM program includes various partner countries from 14 different regions and more than 120 countries.

These programs have been complementary in two aspects. On the one side, they show us the expansion of the EU programs to the outside of the EU borders with new dynamics and conditions. On the other side, while some of them were solely focusing on student/staff mobility; the others were aiming to modernize higher education institutions, facilitate the transition and reform or to offer a joint degree for master-level students. Especially those programs applicable to non-EU countries were developed with the re-adoption and transfer of the already existing EU mechanisms in different regions and dynamics. Moreover, these programs were not only examples of the expansion of the European higher education policies and the EU's influence on non-EU countries but also the historical transition and evolution of the EU's understanding of higher education as well as the higher education policies in global

arena. As it could be understood from the historical background, there have been variety of historical dynamics shaping the higher education policies both in the EU and in the international realm. Especially since the second half of the 1990s, the nature of the higher education has transformed not only in Europe but also in the global arena with the impact of the knowledge-economy. With the increasing emphasis on the knowledge-economy and its requirements, higher education institutions were attributed a mission to raise the workforce with the required skills and competences of the flexible and complex job market. As a result, not only the emphasis of the higher education within the EU, but also its focus on the higher education policies of the wider Europe has been transformed. The EU expanded its higher education programs to the non-EU countries as well, especially with the aim of increasing the appeal of Europe to attract the new talents with required skills and to enhance the quality and internationalization of European higher education institutions. There have been a variety of historical dynamics like Lisbon Agenda, knowledge economy, increasing pressures on higher education and its privatization etc. that have been affecting the EU's higher education policies both inside and outside of its borders.

With the mobility programs open to the non-EU countries, EU higher education policies has been transferred into third countries as well. However, it is debatable whether this process of policy transfer has radically transformed the national education systems of non-European countries or not. In the latter parts, we will try to understand more deeply whether the transfer of policies in the field of higher education led to a standardization in non-member states or this process generates a diversified framework. It is difficult to claim that the policies of higher education are transferred from the EU level to national level in a top-down way without any adjustments. It is clear that such regulations coming from global / regional actors such as the EU are filtered through domestic contexts. It is hard to say that policies in the field of higher education are unilaterally transferred; it seems that they are rather adjusted in accordance with the political, economic and cultural contexts of the country as well as its position in the international arena and even domestic individual (university-based) preferences.

CHAPTER 4

THREE CASES: COUNTRY BACKGROUNDS

4.1 Introduction

The originality of this study depends on its effort to understand interpretations, motivations, and implementations in the selected countries about being part of the EU higher education programs and transferring those policies and programs into national realm with a bottom-up perspective. For this purpose, local peculiarities and domestic concerns require closer attention. Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to understand the national and distinctive characteristics of each selected countries namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, and People's Republic of China with regard to their higher education systems, the relations with the EU and the reflections of those relations in the area of higher education. In other words, this chapter aims to present country characteristics of selected cases with the purpose of providing an essential background for the evaluation and comparison of the qualitative data collected via the interviews.

This part of the study will explore the national qualifications, funding, and internationalization of higher education in selected countries as well as the impact of EU programs and frameworks on them. In addition to higher education qualifications, the chapter will also briefly talk about economic and political relations of the selected countries with the EU due to the fact that educational relations are indispensable part of economic and political collaborations as well and with the purpose of understanding the nature of the EU-country relations (symmetrical or asymmetrical?). Internationalization policies of governments are defined by the role and position of the state as an international actor, administration capacity, formal institutions, size, geographic position, foreign and cultural policy, structural characteristics and

language all matter in the process of policymaking. Other policy areas such as economics, trade, cultural and migration polices also affect the internationalization of higher education which is also shaped by an interplay between policies formulated at the European and the national level simultaneously (European Commission, 2005). Moreover, collaborations between two sides in the fields of politics, economic and technology also requires a constructive diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges and dialogues (Fu, 2019). In that respect, national policies for the internationalization of higher education are part of a broader set of policies which also affect the way and the extent that internationalization can and will take place. Consequently, relations and collaborations in the area of economics, politics and higher education are intertwined and the chapter will explain them in relation to each other.

In terms of the economic relations, the field of higher education is quite important especially because of the connection between the skills and abilities required by the market economy and the higher education systems. Increasing quality of higher education and making them compatible with the needs of labor market is essential with regards to the employability. Moreover, it is also significant in terms of the EU's effort to support re-construction of the post-conflict economies and state building processes. Raising youth with European and market economy-driven abilities are also considered to be essential in the sense of removing radicalization, border management and mobility and hereby regional security. Most of the states also see higher education policies such as Bologna process as one of the required adjustments to the EU and a way for the formal accession to the economic union and to remove unemployment crises as well. Hence, joint economic and social relations also frequently involve a noteworthy educational aspect due to the fact that educational connections and contacts lead to potential business opportunities and contribute on the cultural ties as well (Cai, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, economic relations are also essential in a way that, economically well-developed countries (e.g., China) also highly invest in education, particularly higher education and they do not depend on the EU-funded programs only. On the other hand, for developing countries whose investment in education is insufficient (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina), the EU higher education programs are

quite important due to funding opportunities. Such countries may be reliant on donors and aids of the EU not only in improving their higher education system, its international dimension and mobility of individuals, but also in developing market economy, free industry, and liberal democracy. For these countries, the cost-benefit analyses might work in favor of the EU, since the expected benefit or reward seems higher. Hence, economic status and relations of the countries with the EU will help us to understand as if their most significant motivation to participate and transfer the EU higher education programs might be financial or not.

In terms of the political relations, countries' membership status is essential with regard to their educational collaborations as well. Candidate countries are required to follow EU guidelines due to their membership status. However, those countries who do not have a membership perspective might still be an important ally for the EU, due to their status in international power relations and regional balance of power, trade relations, gas relations etc. In other words, close operation in economic and political realms might make countries indispensable partners in educational collaborations as well.

The backgrounds of the selected countries will be also summarized with the purpose of understanding their state/administrative capacity, formal institutions, existence of veto players, epistemic communities and issue networks, type of the regimes as in line with the mediating factors of the Europeanization theory with a bottom-up perspective.

The sub-sections on the selected counties are structured in a similar way to facilitate comparison. Each sub-section firstly analyzes national qualifications of higher education with a specific focus on their funding and internationalization attempts in the country. Afterwards, the country's political and economic relations with the EU are explained, because of the fact that higher education programs and the funding allocated for such frameworks are part and extensions of those relations and economic aids. Each sub-section finalized by touching upon the country-EU relations in terms of the European higher education programs. With the help of this structure, the chapter will show that each case has its own peculiarities, which will also give us a chance to make a comparative analysis.

4.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a young country that has been dealing with its nation and institution building since 1995. It has a complicated and divided governmental structure which make policymaking (especially in the field of higher education for the purpose of this study) difficult and complex. Despite this complexity of governmental structure, BiH has been part of almost all higher education programs and frameworks of the EU since 1990s and it is still one of the active participants of the EU programs in the Western Balkans. As a country whose state building process is still ongoing, economic and technical assistance of international and regional organizations such as the EU seem to be quite important. Moreover, as a state who was identified as a prospective candidate for the EU membership in 2003 and finally granted EU candidate status in 2022, membership perspective and its requirements are quite essential in the analysis of BiH.

4.2.1 National Qualifications of Higher Education

The system of government was established in 1995 after Yugoslavian war (1992-1995) with the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina which founded two entities; Republica Srpska-RS (central administration) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina-FBIH (ten cantons, each administered by its own government) as well as a separate unit of District of Brcko (semi-autonomous administration). Each of these administrations has their own rules and regulations of higher education as well as their own ministry of education and their budget. For this reason, higher education in BiH is seen as one of the complicated areas.

This complicated governmental structure brings together several difficulties in terms of the improvement of required educational and economic reforms for which the country highly depends on international support for its reconstruction and institutional building in post war- conditions (Gül & Gül, 2011). In the current situation, Bosnian higher education is predominantly characterized by the fragmentation and social, political and ethnic divisions in which even the universities are internally fragmented and aligned with ethnic lines (Temple, 2003). For instance, after the war (1995), the

University of Sarajevo was divided into two with a largely Bosnian university on the one hand and a smaller Serb-dominated institution-known as the University of Srpsko Sarajevo on the other; which was also the case for the University of Mostar that was divided into Bosnian and Croat units (Temple, 2003).

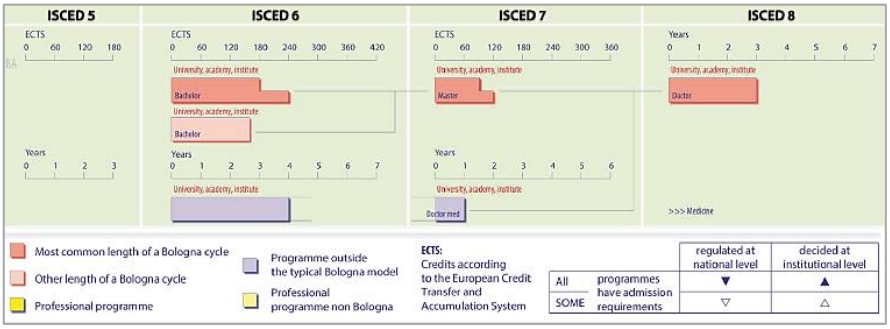


Figure 4.1 The Higher Education System in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Source: European Union. (2017). Overview of the Higher Education System, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Brussels: EACEA.

In BiH, higher education is organized in two types of institution; universities include the HEIs offering degrees in all three cycles in at least five study programs and three scientific areas and higher school or colleges offer first cycle degrees in at least one study program and one scientific area (European Higher Education Organization, 2020). Additionally, higher education is organized in public and private institutions in BiH; however, the number of private universities is quite higher compared to the public ones. According to the data of Agency for Statistics of BiH, there were 10 public HEIs and 37 private HEIs in BiH in 2015-2016 academic year. Once we look at the numbers of students, in the Fall semester of 2020/2021, 78.343 students were registered in the first cycle of higher education (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021). According to 2019 data, gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education was 40.2%, as a result of a substantial increase especially between 2000 and 2019[6].

[6] For details, "Knoema, Bosnia and Herzegovina-Gross Enrolment Ratio in Tertiary Education", available online at: https://knoema.com/atlas/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina/topics/Education/Tertiary-Education/Gross-enrolment-ratio-in-tertiary-education

Moreover, in BiH, higher education is structured in three cycles, as one of the outcomes of BiH's adjustment to the Bologna process. The first one, bachelor's degree, includes undergraduate studies comprising of three to four years of full-time study and 180 or 240 ECTS credits in general. The second cycle, the graduate study of master's degree, comprises one to two years of study with 60 or 120 ECTS credits. The third cycle-the graduate study of doctoral degree involves three years of study with 180 ECTS credits (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2023).

BiH accepted its Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH (FLHE) in 2007, in order to set the standards of higher education. The Law on Higher Education (2007) established certain mechanisms and principles mainly in line with the European standards and Bologna Declaration. Essentially, it introduced four main components of the Bologna process; introduction of the ECTS, three cycle-based study structure, increasing the mobility of students and staff as well as the acceptance of a structure composed of equivalent degrees (Goncharuk et al., 2019). Moreover, after the Strategic Directions for Education Development in BiH with the Implementation Plan for 2008-2015 which priorities the accession of BiH to the EHEA, BiH carried a joint project entitled "Strategic Development of Higher Education and Qualification Standards" to set the higher education principles for the period after 2015 (European Commission, 2022). In the meantime, the Agency for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions was established in 2011. For the following periods, the Strategy of Educational Development of Republic of Srpska (2016-2021) highlighted a set of requirements to increase the mobility of students and staff as well as the visibility of the higher education institutions and reinforce the infrastructure and scientific research capacities and internationalization of teaching (Goncharuk et al., 2019).

Despite the framework laws established for higher education, there is not a well-established and structured enforcement mechanisms at the state level. Coordination is being managed across different levels of government and harmonization of educational standards are not sufficient (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). There is not common standards or mechanisms to measure the quality of education and collect the data about the educational feedback and results, which also negatively affect the accreditation of higher education institutions (European Commission, 2021). Some

studies show that in BiH, scientific outputs are still relatively lower than its neighboring countries like Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia (Goncharuk et al., 2019).

In recent years, BiH have developed significant mechanisms to increase the quality of education such as the introduction of the new curricula based on the competency and the establishment of the Agency for Accreditation and other coordinating bodies. However, PISA 2018 results (OECD Program for International Student Assessment) show that BiH's student performance is the lowest one in Europe. Unemployment rate is quite high and emigration rates are highest in the Western Balkan region. The survey organized by the World Bank in 2016-2017 also prove that employers have difficulties in hiring young people especially because they perceive that the young people do not have their required skills. According to the results of above-mentioned survey, 58% of the companies indicate that the current education system does not meet the need of the skills required by the existing labor market. Hence, bolstering the competences of youth through a renewed education system and development of a modern curricula is considered to be quite essential for BiH (OECD, 2022).

4.2.1.1 Higher Education Funding

In BiH, education is mainly financed by different units of the government, cantons, municipal budgets as well as BD and other entities. Since FBİH allocates funds to cantons, this also creates separational budgets and inequalities among them. There is not a coordinated finance policy for the area of higher education, as the higher education in BiH is very fragmented with responsibility of cantons which are mostly on ad-hoc basis. This also creates imbalances among HEIs, because cantons have authority to allocate higher budget to a specific HEI and lower to another one. Public HEIs are funded by the above-mentioned government authorities as well as by the students' fees; while private colleges generate their own income from donations and other activities like projects, trainings etc. in addition to its tuition fees (European Commission, 2022).

Increasing the percentage of public budget allocated for higher education and establishing common standards for the distribution of financial recourses are among

the priorities introduced in the strategic document titled 2016-2026 Higher Education Development in BiH. (European Union & Council of Europe, 2015). In addition, establishing budget items to support internationalization of HEIs in BiH and international projects and networking activities are further pointed out in the European Union and the Council of Europe report (2015).

Despite the fact that there have been some reforms and strategies in the 2000s to develop and generate their own resources, higher education programs of BiH have largely depended on the EU funds. For example, the EU established the Program of EU Support to Reform of Higher Education in BiH which led to a support of 1.1 million Euro budget. The project (IPA 2007 21) was mainly aiming to improve the education system which does not respond to the needs of the labor market, to fight with the unemployment and support the development of the economy[7]. However, it was understood that the financing of higher education in both political entities of BiH was insufficient.

4.2.1.2 Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization of higher education is the primary emphasis of the majority of national and institutional policy documents and projects in BiH.

To start with, the Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-2020 refers to the certain measures for increasing education level namely; governance and quality of education, improving quality assurance and accreditation, creating funding systems and resources for higher education, increasing and modernizing the study programs in line with the requirements of labor market as well as supporting international cooperation and the EU integration and implementation of Bologna principles (ERI SEE, 2020). Moreover, BiH initiated a project entitled “Internationalization of Higher

[7] European Commission, European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG Near), Bosnia and Herzegovina-financial assistance under IPA, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance/bosnia-and-herzegovina-financial-assistance-under-ipa_en

Education of BiH (STINT)" in 2016 with the aim of strengthening and improving the internationalization process of BiH universities and academic mobility.

Increasing the international mobility of students and staff, encouraging the establishment of study programs in foreign languages as well as the accurate conditions and infrastructure for international mobility (e.g. services like accommodation, human and financial sources etc.), supporting cross-border projects and joint degrees and training HEI staff in foreign languages are one of the priorities declared in 2016-2026 Higher Education Development in BiH (European Union & Council of Europe, 2015) as well. This strategy document stated the priorities to increase the capacity of educational authorities as well as quality assurance in line with the EU standards and enlarge teaching capacities and the relationship with enterprises. Similarly, the Economic Reform Program for 2016-2018 confirms the incompatibility between the labor market and the educational system in BiH and advises certain measures to create a funding for students and staff mobility in order to increase their skills in line with the need of labor market (ERI SEE, 2020).

According to Zgaga et al., in the Western Balkan countries including BiH, internationalization is mostly seen as one of the ways to support national reforms and institutional capacity building (Zgaga et al., 2013). In the region, international activities have been mostly organized by financial support of numerous international and regional organizations, especially the EU and its programs such as CARDS, TEMPUS, Framework Programs and so on. Consequently, internationalization of higher education in Western Balkans is often understood as a matter of implementation and transfer of the EU models as well as harmonization and modernization of higher education (Zgaga et al., 2013). However, despite the increasing commitment, university practices, support services and strategic approaches are still considered to be insufficient especially in some policy areas such as providing ideal conditions for incoming and outgoing participants, attracting academic staff, doctoral candidates and post-docs researchers from abroad, developing joint degree programs, and research support services offering courses in foreign languages, improving language skills among national students and staff and so on (Zgaga et al., 2013).

4.2.2 The Patterns of BiH-EU Relations

In the early 1990s and especially during the Yugoslav war, the EU had a rather weaker impact on the Western Balkans, mostly because of its member states' emphasis on national sovereignty and their lack of commitment and political will to develop a security policy at the European level (Brljavac, 2011). However, according to Brljavac, the EU generated a more strategic perspective after the war, due to the understanding that potential insecurity and conflicts in the region also threatens the stability of the EU as well (Brljavac, 2011). As a result, more assertive and active security and defense policy was developed by the EU, which also became a stronger partner of the Western Balkans particularly after the withdrawal of the US from the region (Brljavac, 2011). After the end of war in Bosnia, the EU has enlarged its programs and initiatives towards the countries of the Western Balkans including the BiH. In 1997, the EU provided economic assistance through the programs like PHARE and OBNOVA which were based on political and economic conditionality, showing that the EU was now willing to perform a more active, committed and strategic role in the region (Brljavac, 2011).

In 1999, the EU established its proposal for its Stability and Association Pact (SAP) for five countries including BiH with the purpose of promoting institution-building, reconstruction of the economy and regional cooperation. In the same year, the EU External Relations Commission established its road map composed of 18 steps for BiH to complete for its being potential candidate of the EU membership (Akdemir, 2018). In June 2003, Thessaloniki European Council Summit, BiH was accepted as a prospective EU candidate country. Since its being identified as a potential candidate, BiH and the EU have signed certain number of agreements on the areas such as visa, trade etc. In 2007, the EU and BiH signed the agreements for visa facilitation and readmission; while Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) was signed in 2008 as a framework for legal, administrative, institutional, and economic reforms required for the EU membership. In 2010, citizens of BiH and Albania got the right to travel to Schengen countries without visa (Akdemir, 2018). SAA entered into force on 1 June 2015 and BiH submitted its membership application in 2016; while the Commission adopted the Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU Membership

Application which outlined 14 key priorities and the required areas of reform for the EU accession of the BiH in 2019 (European Commission, 2022). At the end, BiH was granted as EU candidate status in December 2022.

More recently, European integration has played a central role in the political agenda of Western Balkan countries. For instance, the main aim of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP-1999) was to encourage domestic transition of the region to create a stable area in which military conflict is unlikely and all ethnic groups could live together with their citizens right being guaranteed; which is also one of the preconditions for BiH's long-term goal of EU integration (Ağır & Gürsoy, 2016). In that regard, the EU has been supporting BiH's state building process on the basis of the principles of liberalism and democracy. As a part of its reconstruction, the EU has provided almost 2.5 billion Euros of financial assistance from 1991 until 2010s. (Ağır & Gürsoy, 2016) Nevertheless, despite its important efforts for the transformation from a war-torn country to semi-functional state, fragmented and weak state institutions, complex structure and ethnic tensions was still existing in the country in 2010s, which makes its EU progress difficult (Ağır & Gürsoy, 2016). Moreover, according to Ağır and Gürsoy (2016), BiH economy was still highly dependent on financial aid; unemployment rates were still high especially among young people and education system did not necessarily comply with the needs and requirements of labor market.

For most of the Western Balkan countries including BiH, Europe and the EU are synonymous to a great extent, and it is widely seen as a political destination rather than a geographical entity. In line with this perspective, the higher education policies such as Bologna process are also seen as one of the required adjustments to the EU and a way for the formal accession to the economic union (Zgaga et al., 2013). Moreover, according to the survey conducted by Akdemir (2018), BiH's EU membership is highly supported by its citizens (72% of the respondents). Additionally, most of the participants identify unemployment, economic crises as well as the troubles of human rights, peace and democracy as the main problems of the country and see the EU as a key for solving these difficulties (Akdemir, 2018). However, unlike the citizens, there

is not a high level of consensus among political elites who do not have a sincere agreement about the aims of BiH's EU integration (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).

However, despite its reforms to Europeanize since the late 1990s, according to the analytical report and key findings of the Opinion of the European Commission, BiH still needs to reform and strengthen its constitutional framework, functionality of institutions and judiciary to prevent corruption and crime, organize border management and migration and protect fundamental rights of its citizens and civil society (European Commission, 2019). It is still an unstable country with full of political infighting and strong ethnic divisions which negatively affects its European integration. In BiH, the party system is solely sectioned in the course of ethnic lines among Bosnians, Croats and Serbs (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). These nationalist ruling elites or in other words, multiple veto points in Bosnia do not solely concentrate on European agenda; rather, their main focus is on the short-terms ethnic and nationalists gains. Rather than supporting European integration, most of the nationalist elites see the EU integration process as a threat to their power and encourage the ethnic polarization. BiH has been waiting as a potential candidate since 2000, longer than other Balkan states. While other countries of the region have made important developments for membership, ethnic tensions of the country and Bosnian political elites or veto points made BiH to lay behind. For the accession of the BiH, the task is more complex, as it has not yet completed the state-building process; while other countries of the region still had stable and established institutional frameworks, despite their ongoing social and economic transformations.

This status of the Bosnia and Herzegovina explained in the paragraph above is critical for the purpose of this study in the sense that, on the one hand, the complex structure of the country and its institutions prevent the coordination and harmonization of policies to fully align legislation and implementations with EU acquis and the cantonal level policies are not sufficient. On the other hand, this complexity and lack of a central and harmonized authority might create more space for the influence of international and regional organizations such as the EU. Moreover, as explained in the theoretical part of this study, domestic changes might be result of many variables other than the impact of the EU; but local actors or multiple veto points may still use the EU rhetoric

to legitimize their power, positions and agenda. In that sense, political elites of BiH may use the EU rhetoric for the sake of their positions, but they may also undermine these efforts of Europeanization with different agenda on their minds. For the purpose of this study, it is also important to understand the position of governments in order to clarify whether there is a governmental and top-down pressure on HEIs for being part of the EU higher education programs or not.

Once we look at the economic relations, the EU is the largest trading partner of BiH, which is clearly signified in the import (60%) and export (75%) rates of the country's economy in 2021. Moreover, the EU is the biggest donor of financial assistance of BiH since 1996, particularly under the programs such as the Phare, OBNOVA, Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS), Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and Erasmus+ is one of the EU programs co-financed through IPA funds for BiH.

Between 1995 and 2008, BiH received 2.8 billion Euro assistance from the EU within the framework of CARDS and IPA. In the following periods, BiH was aided 615 million Euro from the IPA in 2007-2013 (Akdemir, 2018). In 2008, the finance agreement for the instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) was signed, which established the free-trade area between the EU and BiH (Akdemir, 2018). In 2020, the amount of Foreign Direct Investment of the EU for BiH was almost more than 220 million Euros. For 2021-2027 period, the total IPA support for the whole enlargement region is determined as 14.162 billion Euro (European Commission, 2022). Because of the severe impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, BiH also received significant amount of financial help for the needs of its public health system as well as vaccines (European Commission, 2021).

According to the report of European Training Foundation (2021), BiH economy was having a slow growth rate especially in employment levels. However, especially with the negative effects of pandemic, employment rates started to decrease; in the first quarter of 2020, there was 0.5% decrease in the employment levels. 2019 results of the World Bank (WB) also show that employment rate of adult population is the 2nd lowest in Europe, after Kosovo. Similarly, 2020 European Commission report confirms that

BiH is still at the initial stages of establishing a functioning market economy; as the WB's 2020 Doing Business Reports show that BiH is still ranked 184th among 190 countries in terms of starting a business (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). Moreover, the analytical report and key findings of the Opinion of the European Commission states that BiH needs to increase efficiency and transparency of its business environment and public sector, strengthen market mechanisms and fragmented internal market. This data about the employment rates and business is essential for the purpose of our study in the sense that in order to cope with competitive market pressure, BiH is expected to pay special attention to low quality of education which is not compatible with the needs of labor market, which shows us the importance of its participation EU education programs and funds (European Commission, 2019).

4.2.2.1 Reflections of the EU-Country Relationship on Higher Education

Being part of most of the EU projects like Tempus, Bologna, Erasmus, ICM etc. BiH occupies a great place in EU higher education programs quantitatively in terms of number of mobilities, projects and the program budgets allocated to the country. In the recent situation, BiH is the member of most of the EU programs namely COSME, Creative Europe, Customs 2020, Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+, Fiscalis 2020, Horizon 2020, INTERREG (European Commission, 2019). Almost all of the strategic documents (e.g. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in BiH, Strategic Directions for the Development of Higher Education, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in BiH etc.) encourage the internationalization of higher education in BiH and see one of the keys of internationalization as enlarging the participation in the EU Framework programs, Erasmus, IPA and Tempus projects and Horizon 2020 (European Commission, 2018). In that line, "Strategic Directions for the Development of Higher Education in BiH (2012-2022)" states that BiH higher education's inclusion in the European Higher Education would promote the mobility of students and teaching staff (European Commission, 2018). Hence, participation in all these programs appears to be instrumental for the internationalization of higher education in BiH.

As the country is mostly reliant on donors in the field of higher education for the improvement of new systems and qualifications, funds and initiatives of the EU is one of the instruments that BiH aims to achieve its strategic goal of encouraging the international dimension of education as well as mobility for learning. The EU provides financial aid for BiH within the framework of the Instrument for pre-Accession (IPA) and most of the recent initiatives and developments in the area of education and training have been organized predominantly as part of EU-funded projects (European Training Foundation, 2021).

The state strategy documents such as Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers' Decision on Adoption of the Baseline of Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2011) and the Action Plan for the Establishment and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015) and reports of European Commission strongly refer to the economic reconstruction with a great emphasis on higher education as a need to increase cooperation with industry and the employability of graduates with certain competence and skills, as required by the labor market (Europeam Commission, 2016). In that respect, higher education is also attributed a central role in the reconstruction of the post-conflict economy as well as state-building and nation-building in a society where the tensions and ethnic conflicts are still going on (Zgaga et al., 2013). As in the most part of the world, in Western Balkans, higher education is largely linked with economic roles and competition in global market, especially within the framework of the EU's knowledge-based economy. However, there are still conflicting perspectives in terms of the integration of the universities; according to the questionnaire conducted by Zgaga et al. (2013), whereas the interviewees from the ministries and administrative agencies would like to implement European trends, faculty deans and teaching staff understand the European integration as a way to centralization of power and resist to the idea of seeing Western Europe as a model to follow.

BiH has been involved in Tempus program since 1996 and joined the Bologna process in 2003; so, it is one of the countries that have been part of the EU higher education initiatives since the initiation of those programs at the EU level. Between 1996 and 2013, the country participated in 154 Tempus projects, including 109 Joint Projects,

and 44 Structural Measures as well as 111 individual mobility grants for teaching staff, total value of which was about 34.5 million Euro[8]. After being part of Bologna process, all public universities in BiH started to implement first and second cycle study programs and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in 2006. Since 2007, BiH has been part of EEEPUS-III that offered funds for mobility in 16 European countries. In 2009, as a mandatory act for accredited higher education institutions, the Instruction on the Form and Content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement was issued by the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (European Training Foundation, 2021). After the period of 2007-2013, BiH signed a new Erasmus+ Agreement that substituted previous programs such as the Lifelong Learning Program, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus and Alfa in June 2014 (European Commission, 2022). In order to support its improvement and align their system with the European opportunities, in 2016, Council of Ministers signed the document Decision on Adoption of Priorities for Higher Education Development in BiH for the Period of 2016-2026.

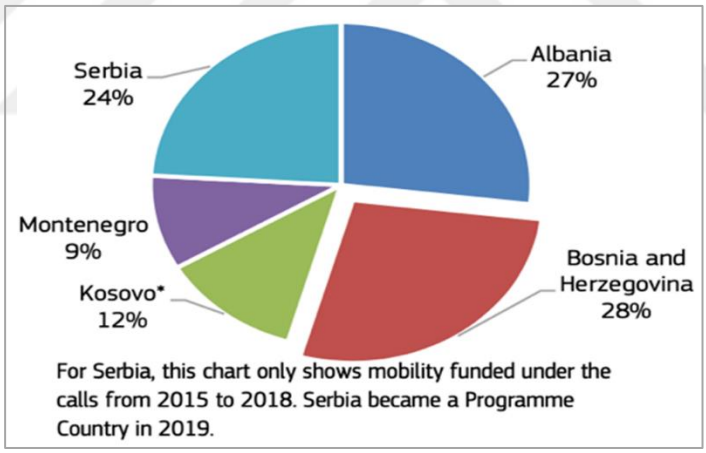


Figure 4.2 ICM Regional Budget, Western Balkans 2015.

Source: European Commission. (2021). Erasmus+ for higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Country factsheets: The EU's Neighborhood, Western Balkans and Russia.

[8] National Erasmus+ Office in BiH, Tempus in Bosnia and Herzegovina, https://www.erasmusbih.com/en/tempus-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina

As the most recent and comprehensive program of the EU, BiH has also been an active participant of the ICM program as well. Within the program covering 14 different regions and 120 countries, Western Balkans was one of the regions having highest share of the program budget (it was the second one after South Mediterranean) during 2015-2020 period. Throughout the same period, 8168 students and staff moved from BiH to Europe; while they hosted 5140 students and staff within the framework of ICM Program (European Commission, 2021). In the same period, 908 Capacity Building Projects and 250 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees were selected (European Commission, 2021) Within the framework of Erasmus 2014-2020 Project, more than 12,169 beneficiaries of BiH participated in mobility programs (European Commission, 2021). As it can be seen in the Figure 4.2., BiH had the highest share in the total budget of the region in 2015-2020 term. For the Erasmus+ period of 2021-2027, total program budget became almost doubled compared to 14.7 billion of 2014-2020 and it increased to 26.2 billion Euro, 70% of which will be used to support mobility opportunities (European Commission, 2021). The exact share of Western Balkans and the BiH has not been announced by the European Commission yet, but the role of BiH is expected to increase even more, especially because the Republic of Serbia is no longer be a Partner Country under ICM (since 2019), which means that the rest of the region is likely to benefit even greater opportunities and budget.

4.3 Republic of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of the post-Soviet countries that has been dealing with its transition from Soviet legacy to the market economy and liberal democracy, since its independence from the USSR in 1991. Even though it is not a candidate country for the EU membership, Kazakhstan is still an important ally of the EU due to its critical geographical location in terms of the regional security as well as being one of the energy suppliers of the Union. The close relationship of the EU and Kazakhstan is also reflected in the collaborations of higher education as Kazakhstan, being the first and only member of Bologna Process and EHEA of the region, has been the most active participant of the higher education programs and frameworks of the EU in Central Asia. Although Kazakhstan has been receiving the EU donors and technical assistance

since 1991, its being an upper-middle-income country as of 2015 and availability of scholarship programs of government for international studies (e.g. Bolashak Program) are also quite essential in the analysis of Kazakhstan.

4.3.1 National Qualifications of Higher Education

The sources of state policy in the area of higher education in Kazakhstan are the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1005) as well as Law on Education (2007 and its 2011/2015 amendments) and a number of strategic documents such as Strategic Development Plan of Kazakhstan until 2020 and the Development Strategy of Kazakhstan until 2050, which recognize education as one of the top priorities (European Union, 2017).

In Kazakhstan, there are currently 129 universities; 33 of them are state-owned, 92 of them are private and 4 of them are foreign. According to the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms, number of active students studying in higher education institutions in 2021-2022 academic year is 576.557 (around 30% are sponsored by state grants) and the number of teaching staff working in Kazakh higher education institutions is 36.307 (Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, Press and Public Relations Department, 2021).

After it signed the Bologna Declaration in 2010, Kazakhstan revised its higher education structure into a three-level model that includes higher (Bachelor) and postgraduate (Masters and Doctorate) studies. The first level-bachelor’s degree lasts at least four years, and it includes a study of minimum 129 credits in theoretical training, 6 credits in practice and 2 credits of a final project or thesis. The number of total credits that must be obtained for the bachelor’s degree varies from 160 to 224 for different disciplines. The second level-master’s degree involves 1-2 years study with 60-120 credits according to the duration; while the third level-PhD degree is for three years and minimum 60 credits of study (European Union, 2017).

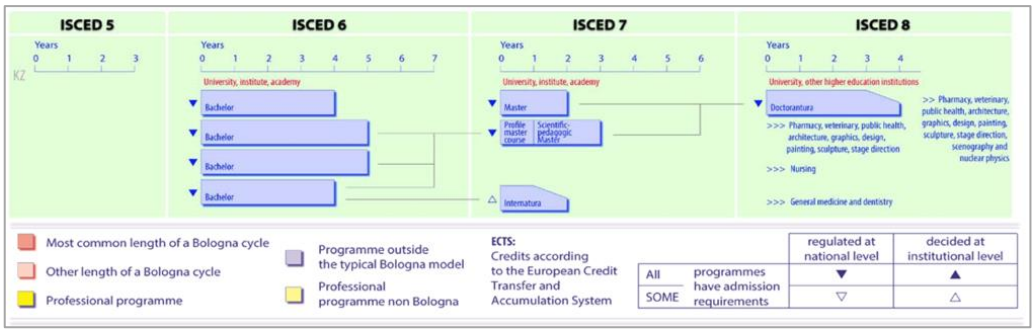


Figure 4.3 The Higher Education System in Kazakhstan.

Source: European Union. (2017). Overview of the Higher Education System, Kazakhstan. Brussels: EACEA.

In 2011, Kazakh government introduced a new classification of higher education institutions. According to this classification (figure below), the type of HEIs is mostly determined with the number of faculties and specialties; while the institutions having less than three faculties are described as an institute, those having at least 3 and more have right to apply to become a university.

Type	*Description*	*Example*
	Universities	
National research university	A HEI which has a special status and programme of development for 5 years approved by the government, independently developed educational training programmes of higher education in three and more groups of specialties, using the outcome of pure and applied studies for generating, and in the transfer of, new knowledge	Al Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty)
Research university	A HEI which implements programmes of development for 5 years, approved by the government and educational training programmes of higher education, in three and more groups of specialties. It uses the outcome of pure and applied studies for generating, and in the transfer of, new knowledge	Not defined
University	A HEI that implements educational programmes of higher education, master and doctoral programmes in three and more groups of specialties, carries out pure and applied research and is a scientific and methodological centre	Suleyman Demirel University (Kaskalen)
	Academy	
Academy	An educational institution that implements educational programmes of HE in one or two groups of specialties	Academy of Civil Aviation (Almaty)
	Institutes	
National higher education institute	A HEI which is a leading scientific and methodological centre in the country with a special status	Not defined
Institute	An institution that implements professional educational programmes of HE	Atyrau Institute of Oil and Gas (Atyrau)

Figure 4.4 Classification of Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan.

Source: Ahn, E., Dixon, J., & Chekmareva, L. (2018). *Looking At Kazakhstan's Higher Education Landscape: From Transition fo Transformation Between 1920 and 2015*. In H. Jeroen, A. Smotentseva, & I. Froumin, 25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in Post Soviet Countries (pp. 199-227). Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education.

During the Soviet era, higher education area including the programs, subjects (most of which were narrowly focusing on engineering, oil and gas industry and pedagogy) and quotas were mostly controlled by the centralized government in line with the Soviet objectives (AllahMorad, 2021). In the current situation, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is the main authority that regulates the education system and legislative acts. The MES centrally regulates and monitors the establishment and operation of public and private higher education institutions. Additionally, the Ministry supports the internationalization of higher education through certain initiatives such as providing state grants for student and faculty mobility, establishment of intergovernmental exchange agreements and accreditation regulations and foundation of an international University (Nazarbayev University).

Right after the end of Soviet period in 1990s, there were only 55 higher education institutions in Kazakhstan with 287.000 enrolled students. As claimed by Ahn et. al., these institutions were under the impact of Soviet political ideology, with poor financing, narrow specialties of Soviet raw economy and being far from international trends and practices (Ahn et.al., 2018). After its independence from the USSR in 1991, Kazakh higher education has experienced a reform process which is explained in four different stages by some authors. The first stage (1991-1994) is characterized by the establishment of the legislative base of the modernization. The second stage (1995-1998) is described with the conceptional definition of higher education system and the actual start of the modernization; between 1995 and 1997, the first Kazakh educational standards on 310 higher education specialties were recognized. The third stage (1999-2000) is accepted as the beginning of decentralization of higher education management and finance, while the fourth stage represents the period since 2001 to today with more strategic developments (Massyrova, et.al., 2015).

The most important departure from the Soviet legacy started with 1993 legislation which permitted the establishment of private universities in Kazakhstan, although they

were still under the competency of centralized government. After 1993 legislation, 32 additional higher education institutions-most of which private, were established. By 1996-1997, percentage of private institutions (56.8%) exceeded the public universities (43.2%). In 2000, privatizing of public universities began and 12 public HEIs turned into joint stock companies in which Kazakhstan government shares ownership with other shareholders (Ahn et. al., 2018). Additionally, the government introduced tuition fees for public universities which were previously free (AllahMorad, 2021). Hence, after 1993 Law, funding and ownership of HEIs started to be privatized in Kazakhstan.

In addition to legislations accepted in the 1990s, the Law on Education (2007), the Law on Science (2001, 2011), the Law on Innovative Activities (2003), Patent Law (2003) and the Law on Support of Innovative Activities (2006) outlined the legal framework of higher education reform in Kazakhstan. In 2011-2012, the Independent Agency for Accreditation Rating and Independent Quality Assurance Agency were established, which led to the decrease in the number of HEIs from 182 to 126 in 2015-2016 academic year (Ahn et.al., 2018). Similarly, the number of students that peaked in 2006 with 775.762 students declined to around 460.000 students in 2016 (Nadirova, 2022).

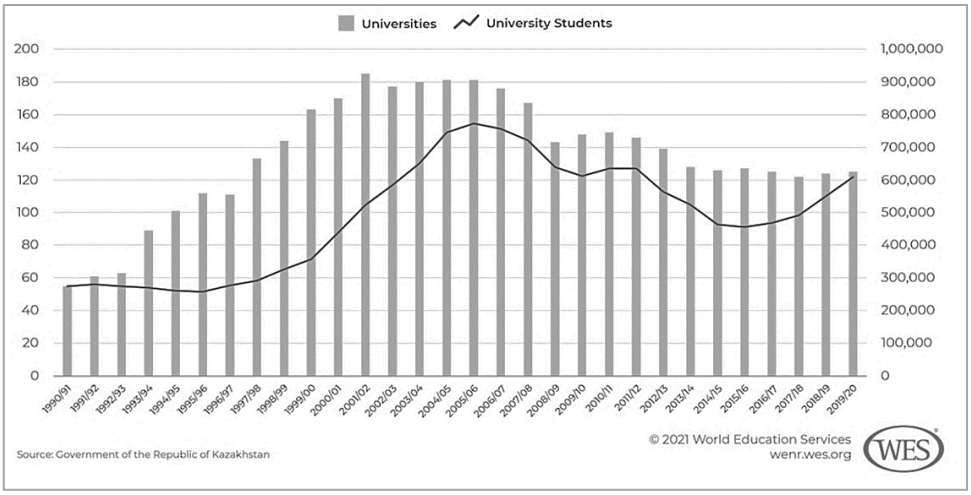


Figure 4.5 Post-Independence University Growth and Enrollment Trends.

Source: Education System Profiles: Education in Kazakhstan, Sidiqa AllahMorad, July 2021, WENR World Education News + Reviews, https://wenr.wes.org/2021/07/education-in-kazakhstan.

4.3.1.1 Higher Education Funding

Compared to the other countries of the region, Kazakhstan is the only state with a higher middle-income level (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). Among the states of the Central Asia (e.g. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have significant funding problems in the field of education), Kazakhstan comes to front with its energy resources through which it can provide funding to education system and an increasingly well-developed private university sector (Jones, 2010).

Between 2007-2012, the state expenditure on education increased more than threefold (European Commission, 2012). However, the government's funding share on education is below the level recommended by the UNESCO-6-7% of GDP (Nessipbayeva & Dolayeva, 2013), which points out to need for further efforts for reaching at a sustainable development level. For instance, in 2013, the government spending on higher education was approximately 5.2. million Euros, which makes 4.2% of its GDP (Bednyakova, 2014). The government funding for study abroad programs can only cover 10% of it (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016).

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan Ministry of Education and Science still provides state grants to train a number of specialists each year. According to the 2012 report of the European Commission, 20% of the students receive state grants in Kazakhstan (European Commission, 2012), which shows that government allocates a certain share in its GPD on education, although it is limited. In the 2021-2022 academic year, 56.000 Bachelor students, 13.300 Master students and 1890 PhD students were offered state grants.

Moreover, the Presidential Program-Bolashak Scholarship, initiated in 1993 to train specialists in national priority areas and prepare them for political and economic transition is another essential source for outbound studies. According to the report of the European Commission, more than 28.000 students studied abroad in 2012 including 3000 within the framework of the Bolashak Program (European Commission, 2012). In 2014, 105 million Dollars were allocated to the Bolashak Program by the government (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). The Bolashak International Scholarship Program is still operating, and 1055 participants were

awarded with scholarship recently, in 2022 (Electronic Government of the Republic of Kazkahstan, 2022). Additionally, Ministry of Education and Science started to fund Invited Professorship Program in 2009. Since the beginning of the program in 2009, 7000 professors coming from abroad were hosted in the Kazakh HEIs (Nadirova, 2022). Furthermore, within the framework of their "Serpin 2050" program, the state allocated 1050 grants in 2014 and 5000 grants in 2015, for the training of specialists in 19 different universities of the country (European Union, 2017). Kazakhstan HEIs are also active participants in other international scholarship programs such as Fulbright, the Global UGRAD, DAAD, the University of Shanghai Cooperation, in addition to its Bolashak Program and Erasmus+ programs.

4.3.1.2 Internationalization of Higher Education

After gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has developed a reform process in the past 30 years, to move its higher education from Soviet-driven system designed to meet the needs of the planned economy to the market-driven one in line with the needs of competitive economy. It was not only an economic but also a sociocultural transition to form a new civic identity, which could be seen in the language of education changed from Russian to Kazakh language. However, as a post-Soviet state with the heritage of Soviet education system, the question of how to adopt new methods and approaches and the problem of insufficient level of English in the academy were suggested to be the main problems (Bednyakova, 2014). According to the study of British Council, approximately and only 4% of academic staff working in Almaty had an English proficiency in 2011 (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). In the 2020-2021 academic year, 65% of university students were enrolled in programs taught in Kazakh language, while 29% of them were registered in Russian taught departments and only 6% of them were part of the English-medium specialties (AllahMorad, 2021).

As a first step of internationalization of higher education, Kazakhstan established its international program of "Bolashak" in 1993 which provided scholarship for brilliant Kazakh students to study abroad. As a first program of this kind, Kazakhstan became

the pioneer country among the post-Soviet states, with its Bolashak program (Bekbauova et al., 2017), which was identified as the best scholarship program in the world by the British Council in 2014 Going Global Conference (AllahMorad, 2021).

Secondly, some institutional steps were taken for internationalization. In 2001, the National Centre for Educational Quality Assessment and the National Accreditation Centre were established. In order to increase the mobility of students and staff and align the institutional structure with international one, 5-year bachelor's degree was transformed into 4-year degree, in 2004. As a third step, the government established a flagship University-Nazarbayev University in 2010 as an English-medium and Western-style institution with comprehensive international collaborations which was another benchmark for the internationalization efforts.

Fourthly, the State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 (EDRK) declared one of its aims as ensuring the integration in the EHEA and aimed to have one out of every five students studying abroad through academic mobility programs. As the academic mobility programs started to become popular and common, the legal authorities for the coordination of such programs were established; in 2012, the Center of the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility were launched (Sayasat, 2013). In the same year, Strategy for Academic Mobility in Kazakhstan 2012-2020 and Implementation Plan was accepted by Kazakhstan Ministry of Education and Science on the basis of EDRK and the document aimed to have 20% of Kazakh students mobile by 2020 (Nadirova, 2022). The Strategy 2012-2020 was also aiming to increase the number of programs taught in English, improve the English proficiency of students and staff and encourage the collaborations with foreign universities and organizations (AllahMorad, 2021).

According to the University World News, Kazakhstan is one of the top 15 states in the world and the first one in the Central Asia in terms of the number of students that study abroad (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). With the impact of the Bologna process, the number of Kazakh students studying abroad increased from 36.000 (2009) to 49.000 (2013) (Bekbauova et al., 2017). The number was pretty much same in 2015 with 2013 as well and the main destinations for outgoing study were Russia (more than 35.000

of them) and Kyrgyzstan, mostly because of the geographical proximity as well as similarity of language and the education systems. According to the UNESCO Institution of Statistics data, Kazakhstan was the 8th largest source of international degree-seeking students in 2018 (AllahMorad, 2021). On the other hand, the number of inbound students studying in Kazakhstan varied throughout the years; from 10.458 in 2008 to 9077 in 2014, with highest number of students coming from Georgia and other countries of Central Asia (OECD, 2017). In recent years, the number of foreign students studying in Kazakh universities has almost tripled with 28.169 students in the 2020-2021 academic year (Study in Kazakhstan, 2022), especially with the impact of government renewed strategy to attract international students and make the Kazakhstan a Central Asian educational hub. Students studying in Kazakhstan are mostly coming from India, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan. Kazakhstan is a leading position among the other countries of the region; as the Kazakh HEIs established approximately 6800 collaborations with international partners in 85 countries during the 2020-2021 academic year (Nadirova, 2022). Like other post-Soviet countries, Kazakhstan higher education system faced a problem of research infrastructure especially in the sense of laboratories and equipment, for which the government also established collaborations with international organizations like British Council to increase research capacity and funding (Ahn, et. al. , 2018).

4.3.2 The Patterns of Kazakhstan-EU Relations

With its strategic geographical position especially for transport routes, Central Asia is located at the intersection of Europe and Asia and promotes Europe and Asia connectivity. More specifically, Kazakhstan is considered to have a significant geopolitical position, as it is located at the crossroads of Russian, Chinese and Muslim domains and a leading role in the transformation and stabilization of the Central Asia (Stamgaliyeva, 2019). Moreover, Central Asia and Kazakhstan as a part of it are important partners for the EU, especially in terms of being main energy supplier and having the market potential as well as an ally for regional security. Additionally, because of the EU's enlargement to Southern Caucasus and its European Neighborhood Policy and Black Sea Initiative, the Central Asia has been an

indispensable partner of the EU. Furthermore, the recent political crisis between the Russia and Ukraine brought the issue of energy and oil supplies at the center of the EU agenda. Due to the cut off Russia's energy exports and the disruption of the pipelines, the Central Asia and especially Kazakhstan is being an increasingly significant ally for the EU member states.

Once we look at the background of EU-Kazakhstan relations, during the first years of the independence, the Central Asia remained relatively peripheral to the EU and its influence has been quite limited especially until 2000s. Particularly after 2001, 9/11 attacks and the intervention in Afghanistan increased the strategic importance of the region in the eyes of the EU (Şahin & Düğen, 2015). At the beginning of 2000s, the EU was basically a donor and technical supporter for the Central Asia, supporting its transition to liberal economy. The first EU framework program for the Central Asia was the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), in force between 1991 and 2006, with the aim of supporting newly independent post-Soviet countries towards liberal and free market as well as democracy and rule of law (Dzhuraev & Muratalieva, 2020). After 2007, another framework program, namely the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), was developed to assist the Central Asia and also covering a broad range of areas such as education and health (Şahin & Düğen, 2015).

The first ever EU Strategy on Central Asia was adopted in 2007 (Matusevich, 2019). The 2007 EU Strategy on Central Asia promoted the common goal of achieving stability and prosperity and having cooperation in areas like good governance, rule of law, human rights, democratization, development of market economy and financial systems, removal of trade barriers, energy sources as well as education and training, in order to have dependable partners with mutual common interests and goals. 2007 Strategy emphasized the EU's special interest in enhancing its energy security and resources together with border management, migration, and international terrorism, because of the geographical position of the Central Asia especially with respect to their closeness to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The Strategy also emphasized the density of the young population in Central Asia and their being potential for the future development as well as the EU's and member states' willingness to support education

system of Central Asia States and academic and student exchanges through major international partners and donors such as Erasmus Mundus and TEMPUS programs (The Council of the European Union, 2007).

In the meantime, Kazakhstan and the EU signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) in December 2015, as a first of its kind in Central Asia. As a milestone in the EU-Kazakhstan relations, the EPCA strengthen their cooperation in the areas of economy, trade and investment, justice, transportation, environment, climate change, social affairs as well as education, culture and research (Press and Information Team of the Delegation to Kazakhstan, 2021).

While the EU's 2007 Strategy had a narrower focus on the questions of security and regional economic development, its strategy re-published in 2019 put the EU-Kazakhstan relations into a broader and more flexible path. In its 2019 Strategy, the EU underlined that Central Asia, and the EU were now closer than ever and bound by strong mutual interests. Moreover, the Council reaffirmed its commitment and willingness to modernize and diversify the economy and support the region in the areas of strengthen democracy, rule of law, human rights, civil society, gender equality, migration, and education. In terms of the education, the Council indicated its willingness to further support reforms to increase the quality of education, academic exchange programs, cooperation between the EU and Central Asia HEIs in order to promote development, economic diversification and job opportunities and to precent radicalization and extremism of young population (General Secretariat of the Council, 2019).

Once we look at the economic relations, Kazakhstan's economy is largely based on energy supplies; oil, coal and uranium and it is one of the major energy suppliers of the EU. It is the third largest non-OPEC supplier of the EU with more than 70% of its oil exports. As Kazakhstan's first trade partner and first foreign investor, the EU's engagement with the Kazakhstan represents 40% of its external trade, 48% of total foreign direct investment and 60% of total net FDI stocks, according to 2021 data (Press and Information Team of the Delegation to Kazakhstan, 2021). In addition to educational support and exchange programs, Kazakhstan has also been receiving

technical and financial assistance of the EU through other instruments such as TACIS, DSI, European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the Nuclear Safety Instrument, the Partnership Instrument. Between 1991 and 2001, the EU assistance allocated to Central Asia was 944.4 million Euro, in which Kazakhstan had the highest aid in the region with its 134.6 million Euro share (Şahin & Düğen, 2015). Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU and its member states also allocated 123 million Euros for Central Asia (Press and Information Team of the Delegation to Kazakhstan, 2021). Despite the technical and financial assistance provided to Kazakhstan, its status recently changed to an upper-middle-income country. With the help of that change as well, Kazakhstan has been transformed from a foreign aid recipient to provider of KazAID through its official development aid program (ODA) (Matusevich, 2019).

4.3.2.1 Reflections of the EU-Country Relationship on Higher Education

As the first and the only Bologna member of the region and being part of all possible higher education programs offered by the EU (Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ ICM etc.), Kazakhstan has been an active player in the EU higher education projects.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the EU initiated a technical assistance program, TACIS, to support the post-Soviet states in their transition to market economy and democracy. Tempus program was one of the instruments of TACIS designed to be used for the area of higher education. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan joined in the program in 1994, earlier than the other states of the Central Asia (European Commission, 2014). During the period of 1995-2010, 76 projects were financed with the participation of Kazakhstan partners with a total fund of more than 54 million Euros (National Tempus Office in Kazakhstan, 2010).

Between 1995 and 2004, European Commission invested around 40 million Euros to Central Asia and 9.9 million Euros in Kazakhstan within the framework of the Tempus program. The Program has contributed Kazakh HEIs to increase their international collaborations, to serve for new qualifications required by the market economy and to align them with the needs of the labor markets (Nessipbayeva & Dolayeva, 2013).

Through a number of projects on the curriculum modernization, quality management, university governance, assessment system, implementation of the ECTS etc. Tempus Program is considered to have contributed to the modernization of the higher education system in Kazakhstan and the learning and teaching processes. Tempus also supported Kazakh higher education system in terms of introduction of new academic specializations, new fields of study and new methods of designing courses as well as enlarging the international cooperation between Kazakh and the EU HEIs and providing access to the latest research and know-how (European Commission, 2014).

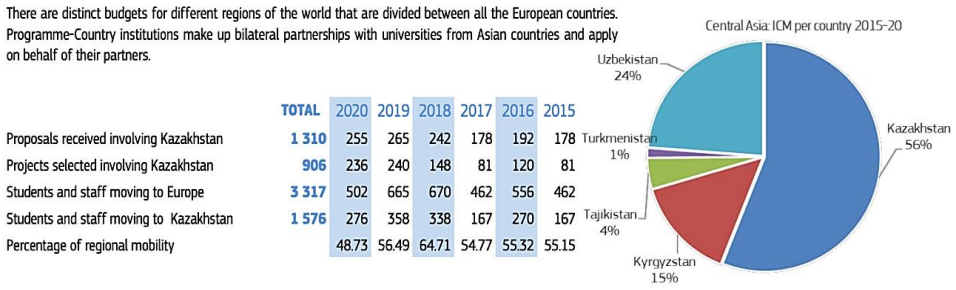
Stages	Years	JEP/JP	SCM/SM	IMG	Total
Tempus II (1995-1999)	1995	3	-	-	3
	1996	2	-	-	2
	1998	2	-	-	2
	1999	3	-	-	3
Tempus III (2000 – 2006)	2001	3	-	3	6
	2002	2	-	1	3
	2003	2	-	3	5
	2004	2	2	4	8
	2005	2	2	3	7
	2006	3	6	3	12
Tempus IV (2007 – 2013)	2008	7	3	-	10
	2009	3	-	-	3
	2010	3	-	-	3
	1995-2010	37	13	17	67

Figure 4.6 Involvement of Kazakh Universities in Tempus (1995-2010).

Source: National Tempus Office in Kazakhstan. (2010). *Tempus in Kazakhstan (1995-2010),* Almaty: EACEA.

Moreover, in 2004, Kazakhstan introduced three cycle-system of Bachelor, Master and PhD studies. In 2010, Kazakhstan joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by becoming the 47th full-member of Bologna Process (BP) and 1st Central Asian state joining in BP. Modernization of Kazakh higher education is considered to have gained a momentum especially after its accession to BP which helped HEIs to have specific opportunities in terms of projects and mobility programs, access to the European education, improve quality and adoption of comparable levels and credits (Nessipbayeva, 2014). Following the Bologna process, Kazakhstan has re-arranged its credit and credit transfer system, mutual recognition of degrees and re-defined

curricular reform in prioritized areas such as engineering, science and technology, social sciences and business (Jones, 2010). Moreover, the EU-Central Asia Strategy of 2007 defined the area of education and training as one of the key grounds to cooperate and share expertise; and, identified the establishment of a European Education Initiative to support Kazakh education and training at all levels, including higher education (Jones, 2010). In addition to the Tempus and its contributions, more than 7000 Kazakh students and staff are entitled to have Master/PhD degrees or received a training (Nadirova, 2022) within the framework of Erasmus Mundus Program as well. Within the scope of Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Program, Kazakhstan accounted for the second (648) in the region, after Uzbekistan (757). An EU report suggests that Erasmus Mundus experience benefited students and staff in Central Asia in terms of professional career (64%), specialized knowledge (51%), development of personality (30%), intercultural competences (47%), language skills (43%) and helped them to find a job (40%) (European Union, 2017). Since 2007, Kazakh HEIs and their students/staff have become part of the EU's Erasmus Programs. In the following years, the new umbrella program designed by the European Commission, namely the Erasmus+ (2014-2020) and later ICM, incorporated Tempus like activities. As it could be seen in the figure below, between 2015 and 2020, 3317 students and staff moved from Kazakhstan to Europe within the framework of Erasmus+ ICM Program; while 1576 students and staff studied in Kazakhstan in the same project (European Commission, 2021).



There are distinct budgets for different regions of the world that are divided between all the European countries. Programme-Country institutions make up bilateral partnerships with universities from Asian countries and apply on behalf of their partners.

	TOTAL	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Proposals received involving Kazakhstan	1 310	255	265	242	178	192	178
Projects selected involving Kazakhstan	906	236	240	148	81	120	81
Students and staff moving to Europe	3 317	502	665	670	462	556	462
Students and staff moving to Kazakhstan	1 576	276	358	338	167	270	167
Percentage of regional mobility		48.73	56.49	64.71	54.77	55.32	55.15

Figure 4.7 Erasmus+ for Higher Education in Kazakhstan, Central Asia: ICM Per Country (2015-2020).

Source: European Commission. (2021). Erasmus+ for Higher Education in Kazakhstan Country Fact Sheets.

By 2019, Kazakh HEIs are cooperating with more than 170 institutions from program countries; 47 Kazakh universities are part of capacity building projects, while 61 of them are also participating in ICM projects (Shayakhmetova, 2019). As the above figure suggests, Kazakhstan has the largest share (56%) in terms of the Erasmus+ ICM budget, EMJMD and Capacity Building projects in Central Asia, which refers to a striking difference between Kazakhstan and the other countries of the region. All these data also support the idea of development of Kazakhstan as an educational hub in Central Asia. For this purpose, Kazakh universities are working on opening branches and representative offices especially in the CIS countries and increasing the global competitiveness of their national system in international higher education market, which is also one of the main goals of the State's Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025 (Study in Kazakhstan, 2022).

4.4 The People's Republic of China

China is the second largest economy of the world whose economic and political influence have grown with an enormous scale in the last decade, especially after the dissolution of its isolation policy. It is neither a candidate country for the EU membership nor has a membership perspective in the near future. However, China is still an indispensable ally and trading partner of the EU, as also representing two of the three largest economies of global market. Remarkably, at the same time, China is a rival for the EU that offers an alternative economic and political model and promotes its own practices of higher education, language, culture and so on with different soft power tools such as Confucius Institutes. As the world's largest source of international students, China has an active internationalization policy and highly invests in the field of higher education through different initiatives and programs. Although it is not a Bologna Member, China still follows the implementations of Bologna Process and EHEA and its participation in EU higher education program became more prominent especially after 2000s. Since then, China has been part of Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ ICM programs and many different Erasmus+ projects mostly with the largest budgetary share of the Asian region.

4.4.1 National Qualifications of Higher Education

As a traditional and long dynasty, Chinese emperors followed an isolation policy, focused on inward development of a self-sufficient country and restricted foreign trade and coastal settlements especially from 15th century until 1970s in order to protect the country from the foreign influences, especially from those of Europeans who were travelling and spreading their ideas, culture and religion. Mostly with the impact of increasing relations with the USA and then due to the requirements of new international market economy, China declared its Open-Door Policy in 1978 to boost productivity through foreign capital, investments and business and also initiated its privatization attempts after 1990s.

Chinese higher education has been expanded significantly in a short time, after the dissolution of its isolation policy. While there were 1022 universities and colleges and 3.4 million students enrolled in these institutions in China in 1998, the number of institutions increased to 2596 in 2016 with a student population of 27 million (Zha, Wu, & Hayhoe, 2019). This was the result of the Chinese government's strategy of the massification of the higher education in 1998, in order to meet the requirements of rapidly growing economy and develop the China's human resources as well as to solve the problem of urban unemployment following the Asian economic crisis and stagnation in 1997 (Cai & Yan, 2017). According to the most current data, the number of Chinese universities and higher vocational colleges increased to 2756 in 2021 (Textor, 2022). Especially after the adoption of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Privately-Run Schools in 2002, a proliferation also occurred in the number of private institutions which increased from 39 to 786 in 2016 making around 27% of all HEIs in China (Gu et al. , 2019). According to the statistics of Chinese Ministry of Education, in 2021, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education reached to 44.3 million and the gross enrollment rate in tertiary education was 57.8% of the relevant age groups, which is an enormous increase compared to the enrollment rate of 3.4% in 1990 (Textor, 2022). At the moment, Chinese higher education institutions award approximately 6-7 million degrees every year (Cai & Yan, 2017).

Undergraduate studies in China include 3-year associate degree programs, 4-year bachelor's degree programs (with around 130-170 credits) and 5 years of study in certain academic disciplines such as medicine, architecture, and a number of engineering programs. Junior colleges and higher vocational colleges only provide education in associate degrees, while the universities offer both type of programs. On the other hand, graduate degrees are offered by the universities as well as independent research academies and institutes (Cai & Yan, 2017). Master's degrees include 2, 2,5 and 3 years of studies which correspond to 27-39 credits of coursework; while doctoral degrees take 3 years of study, 30 credits of coursework as well as a final examination and dissertation (Gu et al. , 2019). Chinese HEIs are divided into 4 groups namely research institutions, research and teaching institutions, teaching institutions, and applied-oriented institutions (Cai & Yan, 2017).

Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE), who works under the State Council is the main authority responsible for the development and planning of the national education, regulations, and quality evaluations as well as the confirmation of academic degrees (Cai & Yan, 2017). In addition to Chinese MOE, there is an educational department of every provincial government which manages and funds the provincial HEIs (Zhu, 2021). As a highly centralized polity, Chinese government has a great role and intervention in the higher education not only in the sense of funding but also as the executive director, regulator, and supervisor in many aspects of the operations of the Chinese institutions (Li, 2016). As illustrated in the figure below, administrative authority is distributed between central and local governments, functioning in a hierarchical, top-down manner. The State Council is responsible for establishing national educational guidelines and policies, while the Ministry of Education (MOE) develops specific policies and regulations. The MOE, along with certain central ministries, maintains administrative oversight of a select group of Chinese universities referred to as central HEIs. In contrast, provincial HEIs are managed by provincial governments, each with its own education department. Despite this division of responsibilities and the collaborative efforts between central and local governments, the central government retains overarching authority and provides guidance to local governments (Zhu, 2021).

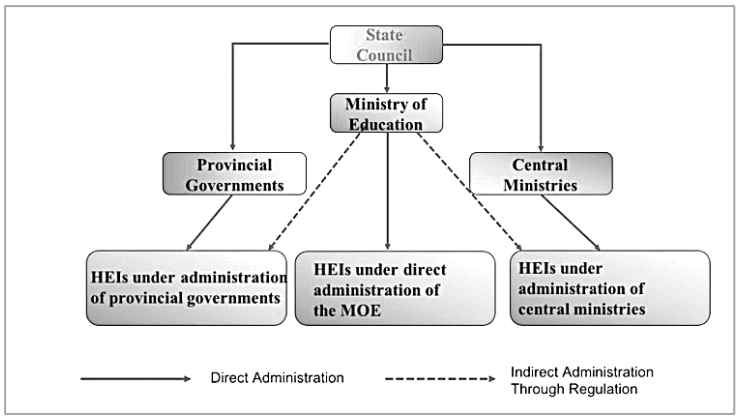


Figure 4.8 Chinese Higher Education Administrative System.

Source: Ying Zhu (2021), Internationalization of Higher Education in China: A Case Study of the University System in Shandong, Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, Ontario Canada.

Until the establishment of the National Association for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Evaluation Organizations Agencies in 2010, quality assurance and evaluation were also organized by the government itself through two agencies; Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre (2003) and Higher Education Evaluation Centre (2004) (Cai & Yan, 2017). Quality assurance agencies measure the improvements and changes effectively, asses how well the educationally objectives are realized and meet established standards and ensure consistent, continuous and high-quality education that meets societal and industrial needs. For this purpose, quality is supposed to be measured and followed by independent agencies and centers, rather than the governmental bodies themselves, which may then increase the control and pressure of the government indirectly.

4.4.1.1 Higher Education Funding

Until the end of 1980s, Chinese higher education was funded exclusively by the government itself. In order to meet the requirements of economic reforms and developments, higher education sources were diversified after the early 1990s with tuition fees as well as school-run enterprises funds and donations. In the early 1990s, Chinese government entitled the universities to accept self-funded students with the

purpose of getting additional funding from private resources, rather than depending on the government funds only (Zhu, 2021). As a result of this process of accepting self-funded students, university enrollment rates increased to 7 million in 2000 and more than 9 million in 2019, which was even less than 3 million in 1994. After 2000s, additional financial sources started to be generated through the collaboration of universities with enterprises and foreign corporations (Zhu, 2021).

In the current picture, Chinese government is still the major funding provider of the higher education in the country, despite these additional sources. The government largely invests in HEIs along with other public organizations especially via comprehensive projects such as Project 211, which aims to strengthen around 100 HEIs and main study fields and offers a number of governmental programs for the internationalization with the help of the Chinese Scholarship Council established in 1996 under the Ministry of Education to fund study abroad programs (Li, 2016). Between 1999 and 2002, the Chinese government invested 3 billion dollars to improve the research and infrastructure of the universities through Project 211 and Project 985 (Zhu, 2021). In the current global environment, China has the second largest budget of research and development after the USA, as well as the second largest pool of researchers after the EU (d'Hooghe et al. , 2018).

Chinese government does not only invest in the field of higher education to support research and infrastructure, but also offers government scholarships to a number of students and staff for outbound or inbound international studies. For instance, after 2016, the Silk Road Government Scholarship program was established and currently it provides funds for 10.000 new international students coming from Belt and Road countries to every year (Qi, 2022). In 2017, more than 31.000 Chinese students studying abroad were entitled to receive state funding (Textor, 2022). Over the past 10 years, the number of international students who were awarded with Chinese government scholarships increased six times. In 2016, 40% of newly accepted international students were provided Chinese government scholarships (China Power, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017); while in 2018, approximately 63.000 out of 492.200 international students also received scholarship from the Chinese government (Textor, 2022).

4.4.1.2 Internationalization of Higher Education

Ancient China had a unique higher education system which was mostly based on traditional philosophies such as Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. However, after 19th century, China attempted to modernize its higher education system by imitating the Western higher educational models including continental European and the American systems.

On the other hand, after the Soviet Communist Revolution and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the structure of the higher education in China became mostly influenced by the centrally planned Soviet model. During this period of early 1950s, Western universities and the institutions financed by foreign governments and bodies were eliminated and HEIs were restructured around the Soviet-driven specializations (e.g., heavy industry) and teaching methods (Wu, 2017).

After the introduction of open-door policy in late 1970s, China has initiated a series of economics reforms in order to transform from centrally planned and labor-intensive economy to market-oriented and knowledge-based one, driven by innovation and international competitiveness (Cai & Yan, 2017). Especially with the impact of globalization and global economic pressure as well as the increasing influence of communication technologies and international organizations, the Chinese government started to focus on the experiences of Western countries again, in the field of education and transfer and adopt them into their domestic reformation process (Zhang & Yu, 2021). As an inevitable result of the China's integration into the world economy (especially after its participation in the World Trade Organization in 1999), Chinese government started to encourage the integration of its higher education with the international community with an aim of increasing the national economic competitiveness (Cai, 2013). In the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s, the Chinese government invested heavily in the field of higher education and the principles of marketization and decentralization started to be introduced simultaneously (d'Hooghe et al. , 2018). After the establishment of the Outline for Education Reform and Development in China in 2003, the Chinese government also introduced several reforms between 1993 and 2010 with emphasizes on decentralization, liberalization

and privatization (Cai & Yan, 2017). With the beginning of 1990s, Beijing introduced numerous initiatives such as the Project 211, Project 985, Plan 111, World Class 2.0 Initiative and so on, in order to improve the quality, research capacity and international competitiveness of the universities and to establish world-class institutions (Gu et al. , 2019). As a result of the rapid improvement of the national economy and growing involvement in the global market, China became more in need of well-educated talent in order to satisfy the demands of the internal market and launched the Thousand Talent Plan in 2008 to employ top international talent in scientific research, innovation and entrepreneurship (Fu, 2019).

During the first years of the Open Door Policy, the internationalization activities were mostly inward-oriented with a specific focus on the outbound study of students in selected regions such as the USA and the UK and the target and the destinations were almost entirely controlled by the government itself (Guo et al. , 2022). In addition to encouraging outbound mobility of students to learn from abroad, inward-oriented internationalization also refers to the importation of foreign experience, models, knowledge, culture and philosophies. On the other hand, outward-oriented internationalization is about exportation of domestic models, higher education systems, knowledge, culture and educational philosophies as well recruitment of international students, cultural diplomacy programs (e.g. Confucius Institutes of China) and development aid in higher education (Wu, 2017). In August 1978, the Chinese government announced its program of sending more undergraduate and graduate students to study abroad and MOE issued its first policy of study abroad for Chinese students with their own fundings in 1981. After the end of 2000, the range of countries to study abroad increasingly extended to 103 countries and regions (Zhu, 2021). Number of Chinese students going abroad for their higher education study per year increased from 134.000 in 2006 to 608.400 in 2017 (Zha, Wu, & Hayhoe, 2019). Unlike other two cases that this study examines, China is the largest source of international students and country of origin in the world (for the EU as well), mostly due in part to its massive population. According to the data provided by Chinese Ministry of Education, around 608.400 outbound Chinese students studied abroad in 2017 which corresponds to 11% increase compared to 2016 data (d'Hooghe et al. , 2018). Even though the numbers were negatively affected due to the Covid-19

pandemic in 2020, in 2019, around 703.500 Chinese students studied abroad with a 6.25% increase compared to the previous year, which makes the China the biggest country of origin for international studies (Textor, 2022).

Continent	Number	Percent
Asia	295,043	59.95%
Africa	81,562	16.57%
Europe	73,618	14.96%
America	35,733	7.26%
Oceania	6,229	1.27%

Figure 4.9 Number / Percent of International Students by Continent.

Source: Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of China. (2019). Statistical Report on International Students in China for 2018.

However, until the beginning of 2000s, there was a huge difference between the number of inbound and outbound students (Guo et al. , 2022). Only in 2008, international students coming to China for study (223.499) outnumbered the number of Chinese students studying abroad (179.800) for the first time (Wu, 2017). Especially following the economic opening of the country after 1980s, China started to follow an active internationalization strategy which is more outward-oriented, in order to enlarge its international influence in the world system of knowledge economy, as the second largest economy of the world. While in 1995, there were only two transnational institutions and programs in China, by 2021, these numbers increased to 154 transnational institutions and 1187 international programs (Huang, 2022). Moreover, unlike the other two countries that this study examines, China has had more assertive internationalization strategy which also included establishing overseas branches (e.g., Soochow University's branch campus in Laos, Xiamen University's branch campus in Malaysia, Tongji University's Florence campus, Peking University's London campus

etc.), international joint colleges and programs developed in cooperation with governments, universities and companies abroad. These efforts of the Chinese government also show their policy of changing one-way transnational higher education system (which depends on the transfer of Western policies) into two-way structure through exporting China's ideas, standards, language and culture with the help of these overseas institutions (Huang, 2022). Additionally, around 2300 schools and projects run by Chinese-foreign collaborations were approved by the MOE in June 2020 (Zhu, 2021).

Especially 2010s marked a turning point in the internationalization of Chinese higher education, with the impact of establishment of the Study in China Initiative (SCI). With the help of SCI, recruitment of international students began to be one of the three-pronged outward-oriented strategies of China, together with Confucius Institutes (CIs) and international development aids (Qi, 2022). The number of international students enrolled in Chinese HEIs increased to 238.184 in 2009 and 492.185 in 2018 (coming from 196 countries), which is a significant rise compared 1236 students in 1978 (Qi, 2022). According to the data of the China Ministry of Education, around 13% of these international students were provided Chinese government scholarships (Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of China, 2019). The geographical distribution of international students coming to China for their higher education studies is presented at the figures above and below. As indicated in these figures, more than half of international students coming to China are from neighboring countries like S. Korea, Thailand and Russia (China Power, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017).

China is also aware of the critical role of the higher education in terms of the soft power and tries to enlarge its influence with the help of Confucius Institutes that it establishes throughout the world (Rui, 2014). CIs are non-profit education organizations which are supported by the Hanban-a central-level functional unit of the Chinese government, aiming to offer education in Chinese language and culture through a collaboration of two academic institutions, one foreign and one China. Since the initial establishment of the first CI in South Korea in 2004, more than 500 CIs were established in 130 different countries and despite the criticisms, Chinese government

has been utilizing these organizations as an instrument of soft power and cultural diplomacy (Wu, 2017).

Rank	Country	Number
No.1	South Korea	50,600
No.2	Thailand	28,608
No.3	Pakistan	28,023
No.4	India	23,198
No.5	United States	20,996
No.6	Russia	19,239
No.7	Indonesia	15,050
No.8	Laos	14,645
No.9	Japan	14,230
No.10	Kazakhstan	11,784
No.11	Vietnam	11,299
No.12	Bangladesh	10,735
No.13	France	10,695
No.14	Mongolia	10,158
No.15	Malaysia	9,479

Figure 4.10 Number of International Students by Country of Origins.

Source: Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of China. (2019). Statistical Report on International Students in China for 2018.

According to the records of December 2019, China established 547 CIs (138 in Asia, 61 in Africa, 190 in Europe and 138 in the Americas) and 1172 Confucius Classrooms in the primary and secondary schools of 162 countries and regions (Zhu, 2021). The role of CIs became even greater after the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, which was designed to build cooperation and connect China across Southeast Central and South Asian neighbors through economic corridors and vast network of railways, energy pipelines and highways. The influence of CIs became bigger because of the fact that one of the purposes of the Belt and Road Initiative was to connect cultures and erasing the cultural distance as well by promoting Chinese culture (Wang, Han, Fidrmuc, & Wei, 2021). According to Lien and Miao, CIs, alongside with its counterparts like Goethe Institutes and the British Council do not only aim to enlarge the soft power of the home country, but also increase the higher education export as well as the economic benefits by attracting more international students (Lien & Miao, 2018).

In addition to CIs, as a part of its outward-oriented strategies, China offers international development aids to developing countries-African and ASEAN countries, in order to improve local educational conditions, trains local academics and teachers, sends Chinese teachers and supports student exchanges with these countries. For example, within the framework China-Kenya Higher Education Program, Nanjing Agricultural University of China founded a new and modern biotech lab for Egertan University in Kenya. Moreover, within the framework of 20+20 Cooperation Plan, 20 HEIs in 17 African countries were paired with 20 Chinese universities (Wu, 2017).

The uniqueness and importance of China for the purpose of this study is also reflected in the status of Chinese HEIs in international rankings. In recent years, Chinese universities started to be ranked high in several well-known international rankings. Actually, China has even surpassed the USA for the first time in 2022, in the Media Outlet's Best Global University Rankings with 338 Chinese universities (Zoe, 2022) and its seven institutions were among the world top 100 of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings in 2023 (University World News, The Global Window on Higher Education, 2022).

4.4.2 The Patterns of China-EU Relations

Cooperation of the EU and China in the field of higher education is part of a broader framework of the strategic partnership. Normally, China and the Europe are two different regions with distinctive cultural, historical and political characteristics. However, the growing global influence and scale of economic power and political influence of China made the EU to develop a new and more assertive understanding and reaction in which China is regarded simultaneously a cooperation partner in different areas like the climate change, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests and an economic and political rival (Santiago et.al, 2022).

In its first Policy Paper on the EU (2003)[9], the Chinese government also emphasized the mutual benefits and trust, despite their differences in historical background, cultural heritage, political and economic systems, and disagreements on certain issues. In this first ever policy paper, they aimed to deepen the China-EU political relations under the principle of mutual respect, economic cooperation, and trade as well as cultural and people-to-people exchanges. In terms of the cooperation in the education, it is declared that exchanges at all levels will be expanded. Similarly, China's Policy Paper on the EU re-published in 2014 emphasized the strategic partnership of the EU and the China in terms of economic/trade relations and peaceful development especially in the multipolar system as well as high-level exchanges and political dialogue. This second Policy Paper also aimed to expand the student and staff exchange and increase the number of student flows between two sides to 300.000 times per year by 2020 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014). The last Policy Paper of China on the EU was published in 2018 and it also put emphasis on the multi-polarity, economic globalization, strategic importance of the EU and common interests in terms of the world peace. In terms of the exchanges of students and scholars, the Paper aimed to increase the numbers, mutual recognition of quality of higher education and use the platforms such as the EU-China High-Level

[9] For details, "China's EU Policy Paper (13.10.2003)", available online at: http://cy.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyom/200310/t20031013_3122851.htm

People-to-People Dialogue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2018).

The EU-China Strategic Outlook (2019) highlights that China has transitioned from being a developing country to becoming a major global player and a leading technological power. Over the past decade, its economic strength and political influence have expanded to an unprecedented level. In this Strategic Outlook, it is once again stated that the EU and China are strategic markets for each other with around 1 billion Euro trade per day (European Commission, 2019). Moreover, considering its being a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council with veto power and one of the biggest contributors of the UN budget.

Europe has an intention and concern to work with China especially in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as regional and global issues which require global solutions such as Covid-19 and climate change (as China is the world's largest carbon emitter and the largest investor in renewable energy); thereby, in those planet-size issues, China is a cooperation partner for the EU (European Commission, 2019). However, considering the magnitude of Chinese economy and political influence, simultaneously, it is a negotiating partner, with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests and an economic and systemic competitor and rival which promotes an alternative economic and governance model (European Union, Press and information team of the Delegation to CHINA, 2023). On the side of China, the EU is a potential counterweight to the USA and a significant actor in the global system in which power and influence would be distributed more evenly (Maher, 2016).

In its officially published strategies on China, the EU calls China to respect the rule of law and human rights and states that cooperation with China should be based on reciprocal benefit in economic and political terms as they also share a common interest in supporting multilateralism and Asian security as well as security in Afghanistan and Syria (European Union, 2016). Hence, on the one hand, they have many common interests as the China is one of the six strategic partners of the EU according to the European Security Strategy launched in 2003. On the other hand, China's

unprecedented rise and influence represents a challenge for Europe's very identity, since they do not share core values in political, economic, humanitarian, ideological and historical senses (Geeraerts, 2013). Actually, China, as a repressive and authoritarian regime rejects various norms, principles and values of the EU containing the Western-style constitutional democracy and the rule of law (Maher, 2016). Consequently, the bilateral EU-China relationship involves elements of both cooperation and conflict in which China represents one of the most difficult dilemmas for EU foreign policy (Maher, 2016).

Especially after China's membership of the World Trade Organization in 2001, Chinese economy has made enormous increase, and its real GDP has increased almost fivefold since 2000s. In 2022, China was the third largest partner for the EU export of goods and the largest partner for EU imports of goods; while the EU is the biggest trading partner of the China (Eurostat, 2023). Specifically, since 2010, it is the second largest economy of the world after the USA and China and the EU are two of the three largest economies of the global market (European Union, Press and information team of the Delegation to CHINA, 2023). Despite the deteriorating relations over the past years, due to the sanctions on the human rights violations of the China and the trade measures as well as its position on the war in Ukraine, the EU and China trade in goods still corresponded to 1.9 billion Euro a day in 2021 (EU External Action, 2022). The EU exported to China 223 billion Euro and imported 472 billion Euro goods in 2021 (EU External Action, 2022).

4.4.2.1 Reflections of the EU-Country Relationship on Higher Education

Despite the earlier collaborations between the EU and China in the field of higher education (e.g. the EU-China Higher Education Cooperation Program in European Studies and Social Sciences-1997 and the Agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation between the EU and the China-1998), it was only in 2003 that the Chinese government formulated its first ever policy paper on the EU (Santiago et.al, 2022).

Even though the USA has already benefited from the educational exchanges with China in social and economic sense, the EU has recently detected the importance and

benefits of the educational links with China. As a result of the joint declarations contracted between China and the European Commission on culture and education in 2003, 2007 and 2009, the sectoral policy dialogues in the areas of education, training and culture have been established throughout 2010s. After the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (about trade, investment, market access, intellectual property rights etc.) confirmed in 2008 and the High-Level Strategic Dialogue announced (about climate change, nuclear non-proliferation etc.) in 2010, the People-to-People-Dialogue (HPPD) was launched between the EU and the China in 2012 as a third pillar of the relationship, with a purpose of increasing cooperation in the fields of education, culture, youth and research (Cai, 2013). As people-to-people contacts play a significant role in the development of mutual understanding, knowledge and interests, HPPD became an essential element of further EU-China collaboration, in which each has a traditional, rich and distinct legacy of culture, linguistics and history (European Union, Expert Group on Culture and External Relations-China, 2012).

In the first meeting of the HPPD, both sides agreed to enlarge mobility opportunities in education, increase the number of exchanges especially in the field of higher education and expand the mutual recognition of academic qualifications (European Commission, 2020). In the meantime, in 2016, the first Conference of EU-China Education Ministers was organized in Beijing. Afterwards, during the fifth meeting of the HPPD (2020), both parties indicated their intention and motivation to further promote student and researcher mobilities significantly by using the Erasmus+ opportunities, Chinese Government Scholarships and other available resources, despite the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this sector of higher education. During this meeting, both the EU and China welcomed the results of EU-China Tuning Study[10] about the credit transfers and recognition, in order to address the compatibility of HEIs and foster the exchanges (European Commission, 2020).

Within the first period of the Erasmus Mundus Program (2005-2008), there was a particular China Window which was aiming to provide Erasmus scholarship for

[10] Tuning Study was implemented from December 2012 to May 2014 by the Tuning Academy based in Groningen and Bilbao in close cooperation with Chinese MOE & DG EAC of the EU.

Chinese students for their studies in Europe. During this period, 2866 Chinese students were selected within the framework of Erasmus Mundus degree courses. In the second period of the Program (2009-2012), 10 Chinese universities were already participating in the Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses and Joint Doctorates, and they were entitled to join the consortia of the joint degree courses (Cai, 2013). Within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Program, the budget allocated to China represents the largest portion of the total budget of the entire Asian region and China ranked the third biggest beneficiary of EMJMD in the period of 2015-17 after India and Bangladesh (Fu, 2019). This initial collaborations within the framework of Erasmus Mundus Program extended the dialogues and contacts between the academic staff and institution and national policy makers, despite the fact that there were still many complications such as legislation barriers, lack of unified credit standards, difficulties in credit transfers, language, lack of mutual understanding and so on (Cai, 2013). Actually, even though it is not a member of Bologna Process-BP (unlike Bosnia and Kazakhstan), China also participated in BP forums since 2003 together with Japan, which also shows that BP has evolved from a being pan-European project and extended its influence beyond the European borders (Dang, 2015). Even though they also refrain from the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area in terms of their position in the international marketplace, ASEAN and ASEAN+3 countries including China have also been following the implementations of BP and EHEA as a model for their higher education reforms (Dang, 2015). China even launched an Erasmus-like project-CAMPUS Asia (Collective Action for Mobility Programs of University Students in Asia) in 2011 together with other ASEAN+3 countries, which may also represent a policy transfer and policy learning process (Dang, 2015).

Recruitment of Chinese students in the degree programs offered by the European HEIs is also an important pillar of the economic cooperation and development of mutual cultural understanding, as the Chinese graduates educated in the Europe are expected to be the representatives and intermediators for European business (Cai, 2013) and contribute on the revenue generations of the European countries. Currently, Chinese students represent the largest group of non-EU students studying in the EU. The number of Chinese students studying in the EU countries increased by 34% in the 5 year-period, from 89.540 in 2014-2015 to 120.385 in 2018-2019 (Santiago et.al, 2022).

In 2018-2019 academic year, 35% of non-EU students studying in any of the EU members were coming from China. Even though it is not an EU member anymore, the UK, and then Germany and France are the most favored destinations by Chinese students to study (Fu, 2019). In 2018, more than 100.000 Chinese students were studying in the UK which led to billions of revenues for the British economy, while the numbers were 32.268 in Germany and 28.760 in France (Dadush, Dominquez-Jimenez, & Gao, 2019).

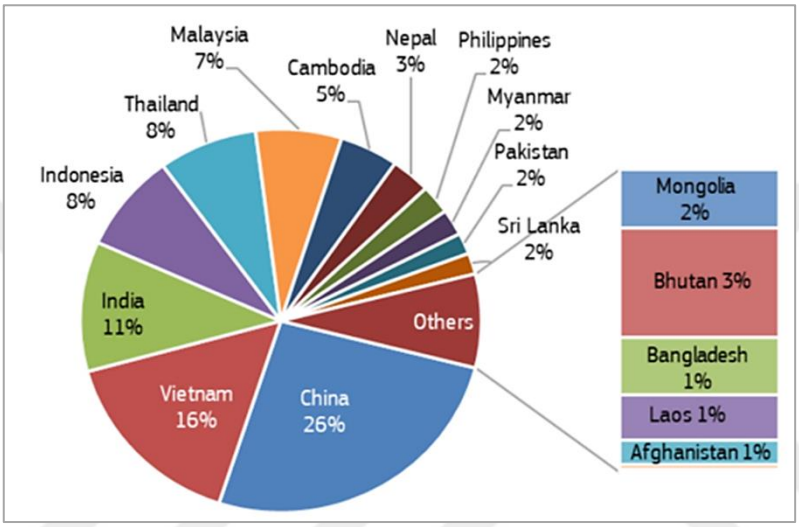


Figure 4.11 Mobility to/from Asia (2015-2020).

Source: European Commission, EU-Asia Academic Cooperation Through Erasmus+ (2021).

Additionally, Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility budget for Asia makes up some 15% of the total Program budget (European Commission, 2021). During the period of 2015-2020, 18.998 students and staff came from Asia to Europe; while 11.645 students and staff coming from Europe visited Asia (European Commission, 2021). Within the framework of these mobility flows, China represents the biggest country in the Asian region with 26% of share in the mobility number of the area, after Vietnam (16%) and India (11%), as indicated in the figure above.

Between 2015 and 2020, 4705 students and staff moved from China to Europe within the framework of ICM program, while 3185 students and staff came from Europe to

China (European Commission, 2021). Moreover, 1088 ICM projects, 62 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Program Projects and 43 Capacity Building for Higher Education Projects involving China were selected during the period of 2015-2020 and 344 Chinese participants won Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters scholarships (European Commission, 2021).

4.5 Conclusion of the Chapter

To sum up, this chapter shows that each of these three countries has distinct and unique characteristics in terms of political, economic, and historical backgrounds and they also have different positioning in their relations with the EU. Partly as a reflection of their collaborations with the EU and also with the impact of their economic and political structures, internationalization and funding of higher education also varies, which will give us a chance to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews in a comparative way.

Firstly, BiH comes front with its complicated governmental structure composed of two different entities and cantons having their own regulations and budget, which also hinders developments of higher education. After the end of the Yugoslavian war, the EU started to have a more strategic and assertive role in the region of Western Balkans, particularly in the BiH and provided comprehensive economic and technical assistance in order to support the country's state building process from a war-torn to semi-functional state and prevent possible instabilities which could also be perceived as a serious threat for the EU as well. As a country which sees the EU membership a key for solving its economic, political, and societal problems, BiH was identified as a prospective candidate for the EU membership in 2003; it was then granted as EU candidate status in December 2022, after its application of EU membership in February 2016. Since 1990s, the EU has been the largest trade partner and the biggest donor of financial assistance for BiH, as it has been highly dependent on international support for its reconstruction and institutional building. However, despite the recent attempts and framework laws, BiH is still lack of well-established structures, mechanisms and harmonized and common standards. Unemployment is still high, and the surveys show

that youth still lack skills that are required by the labor market. It is still an unstable country with ethnic divisions and political conflicts. Once we look at its higher education practices of BiH, internationalization of the higher education is a frequent emphasis in all national and institutional policy documents and strategies and the EU programs and funds can be observed as an important instrument in this sense. In order to shape its higher education in line with the EU standards and models, BiH has been an active participant of all kinds of the EU higher education programs (Tempus, Bologna etc.) for many years and it is a significant participant of the ICM program since 2014-2020 period, with a great role and budget compared to other countries of the region. To summarize, the administrative, financial, and state capacity looks inadequate, multiple veto powers seem influential and the relationship between the BiH and the EU appear quite asymmetrical. Moreover, although the practices and policies of the EU seem to be socially accepted and legitimate by the citizens, multiple veto powers tend to use the EU rhetoric for their own agenda instead.

Secondly, Kazakhstan is another special case of analysis which comes front with its transition from a Soviet legacy to market economy as well as its energy resources and strategic geographical position for regional security. After its independence, Kazakhstan has had a comprehensive reform process for the establishment of market-driven competitive economy and liberal democracy. It was not only economic, but also a sociocultural move and the EU-country relations and the area of higher education have occupied great role in this transition. Being located at the intersection of Europe and Asia-on Russia, China and Muslim domains and having rich energy sources, Kazakhstan seems to be an important and indispensable ally of the EU in terms of the regional security and energy supply. Kazakhstan has received technical and financial assistance of the EU through framework programs like TACIS and DCI and become one of the most dedicated countries of the region for EU higher education programs, which could also be perceived as a political motive in terms of reducing educational, cultural, and political influence of the Soviet legacy. As being the first and only Bologna member of the region, Kazakhstan has been an active participant of the Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programs as well, which contributed to the internationalization of Kazakhs universities as well as the modernization of curriculums, university governance, quality management, development of new study

fields, credit, and credit transfer systems and so on. In due course, the country has been part of the Erasmus+ ICM programs too and it has the largest ICM budgetary share in the Central Asia. In short, the administrative and state capacity of the Kazakhstan looks more adequate than BiH, but the rewards (financial and technical assistance) coming from the EU is still critical. Although its relations with the EU seem more symmetrical due to Kazakhstan's energy suppliers and geographical position for regional security, it is still not possible to evaluate this relation as completely symmetrical.

Lastly, once we look at China, after the dissolution of its isolation policy in 1978 and Soviet influence more specifically after the 1990s, the number of higher education institutions, the students enrolled in these HEIs and internationalization of higher education expanded enormously as a response to its rapidly growing economy and requirements of market and knowledge-based economic system. At the moment, thanks to its massive population, China embodies the largest source of international students in the world, which represents a serious source of income and revenue for the EU countries. Additionally, its relationship with the EU represents another case of peculiar analysis. China is neither a member state nor a candidate country; on the contrary, it does not have a membership perspective at all. China needed to modernize and increase the competitiveness of its higher education area and its cooperation with the EU is important in that sense. However, China and the EU represent two distinct cultural, historical, and political entities with different norms and values. Due to the growing influence, economy and political power of China, the EU was required to develop more assertive strategies on China, and it is a cooperation partner for the EU especially in planet-size policies like the climate change which require global solutions. Moreover, as the two of the three largest economies of the global market (and being the biggest trading partner of China), they both have mutual interests in the stability of the world economy, multipolarity of the international system as well as Asian safekeeping and the security of Afghanistan and Syria. Nonetheless, China still represents one of the most difficult dilemmas of the EU policies due to the fact that its being an economic and political rival offering alternative models of governance and economic models and not agreeing with EU norms and principles. This is also the case in the field of higher education, as on the one hand, China has been a cooperation partner of the EU in its higher education programs (such as EMJDMs) and represents

the biggest budgets of the program in the Asian region. On the other hand, China is a rival and competitor of the EU, because China itself tries to expand its cultural, political, and economic influence by using its government scholarship opportunities, founding offshore campuses and Confucius Institutes, and providing international development aids.

To summarize, the administrative, financial, and state capacity looks quite adequate and the relationship between the EU and the China appear highly symmetrical. However, both cultures seem alien to each other which complicate rules and practices' being socially accepted and legitimate in the eyes of both sides. On the other hand, existence of alternative regional cooperation and internationalization models is highly evident in the case of China.

Once we compare these three cases, the most prominent difference lies in their economic improvement in general and investments in higher education in particular. As a country whose state building process is still evolving and that is at the initial stages of market economy, BiH is highly dependent on the international donors including the EU aid for its reconstruction in post war conditions and also for its higher education practices. Although it is also an upper-middle-income country, mostly due to fragmented governmental structure in different units and cantons with separational and municipal budgets, BiH still mostly depends on outsourcing for higher education developments. On the other hand, Kazakhstan government has been offering a certain state expenditure on education and state grants to higher education students, even though it is still below the ideal rate proposed by the UNESCO. Kazakhstan Ministry of Education and Science has been supporting mobility of students and staff (for both ways) through their own scholarship programs such as Bolashak Initiative and Invited Professorship Program and the country provides its own aid programs (e.g., KAZAID), despite its history of receiving technical and financial assistance of the EU. Unlike Bosnia and Kazakhstan, China-as the second biggest economy of the world and second biggest trading partner of the EU after the USA is not truly depended on the EU funds for its higher education investments, programs, and exchanges. Despite the additional sources and privatization, Chinese government is still the major funding provider, heavily invests billions of dollars in higher education through comprehensive projects

and programs and offers many scholarship opportunities to outbound and inbound international studies. For this reason, as they already have their own scholarship programs (although it is limited), the interviewees of Kazakhstan and China are expected to mention additional motives in addition to Erasmus+ Program grant.

Moreover, as indicated in the Table 4.1., these countries are also varied in terms of the volume of higher education and internationalization strategies. Mostly due to the differences in populations and investments, number of higher education institutions and students enrolled in HEIs differ in three countries. While there are approximately 50 institutions in BiH and around 130 universities in Kazakhstan, China has more than 2750 institutions as a result of the massification of higher education at the end of the 1990s to meet the requirements of rapidly growing economy. In terms of the internationalization strategy, compared to BiH, Kazakhstan seems to have more active governmental policy to attract international students with the purpose of making the Kazakhstan educational hub of the Central Asia. On the contrary, China has even more assertive strategy (especially after the 2000s) composed of establishing Study in China Initiative, founding overseas branches of their HEIs, using the power of their Confucius Institutes, and providing international development aids to developing countries. In that regard, compared to Bosnia and Kazakhstan, China is actively pursuing an outward-oriented internationalization strategy in order to export China's culture, models, language etc. especially with the help of Confucius Institutes that have been established nearly all over the world, even though it also closely follows the practices of European and Western models of higher education by attending the forums of Bologna Process. Moreover, as having the second largest research and development budget and pool of researcher in the world, Chinese HEIs have greater status in international rankings and even compete with the universities in the USA, unlike other two countries.

These countries' relations with the EU and their role and influence in the international balance of power also vary. Although it has been waiting for many years, BiH has been identified as a prospective candidate for the EU membership since 2003, whose candidate status was finally granted in 2022. Hence, higher education policies such as Bologna Process are seen as one of the required adjustments to the EU and BiH's

involvement in EU higher education program and transfer of its policies could be associated with the requirements of membership. As a result, interviewees are expected to mention the EU membership as one of their motivations to participate in the higher education programs of the Union, in addition to Erasmus+ program grants and scholarship opportunities. Unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan and China are not candidates for the EU membership, and they do not have a membership perspective in their near future either. However, they are still important allies of the EU due to their economic, political, and geographical powers, which also affects the relations and collaborations in the field of higher education. Kazakhstan has a quite important status in the EU perspective, mostly because of its geographical position and importance in terms of the regional security and being one of the main energy suppliers of the Union. On the other hand, as the second largest economy of the world, China is one of the most important trading partners of the EU and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto power (which other two countries do not have), it is also a cooperation partner of the Union specifically for global and regional problems. On the other hand, as a country offering alternative models, China is a rival of the Union not only in economic and political realms but also in the field of higher education since China attempts to enlarge its cultural and educational influence with various tools and programs.

Once we look at the higher education more specifically, higher education is attributed a highly important role in all these countries, although the main reason behind this support varies. For BiH, higher education is ascribed a central role in the reconstruction of post conflict economy and state building and there is a great emphasis on higher education and its relationship with the employability of graduates having competences and skills required by the labor market. Internationalization and partly Europeanization of higher education seems to be instrumental for its efforts to support institutional capacity building and national reform in BiH as well as its attempts for EU membership. Similarly, higher education is considered as a very critical tool and field for Kazakhstan, in terms of erasing Soviet influence and also its departure from Soviet-driven and planned economy to market-driven and competitive economy. Lastly, higher education is seen as one of the most critical fields to meet the

requirements of rapidly growing economy of China as well as a significant soft power tool to enlarge its domestic models, culture, and language to the world.

Even though all three states are part of the EU higher education programs (Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ ICM etc.) currently, BiH and Kazakhstan have been involved in programs and frameworks offered by the Union earlier (around 1990s); while joint declarations and policy dialogues with China started to be organized only after 2000s, despite some earlier attempts. While BiH is a member of Bologna Process since 2003 and the Kazakhstan since 2010, China is not yet a member of Bologna Process and EHEA. As a final statement, it is also critical to indicate that all these three states have the largest share in their regional budget of Erasmus+ ICM program currently.

Table 4.1 Short Analysis of the Selected Three Countries.

Country	Higher Education Numbers	Higher Education Administration	Higher Education Funding	EU Higher Education Programs	Economic Status in General	Economic Relations with the EU (*asymmetrical*)	Political Status in General	Political Relations with the EU (*asymmetrical*)
BiH	~ 47 HEIs 78.343 students (20-21) ~40% tertiary education (2021)	Coordination is managed across different levels of government which has their own regulations and budget; Republica Srpska (central administration), Federation of BiH (10 cantons) and District of Drcko (semi-autonomous administration)	Different units of government, cantons and municipal and separational budgets; largely depends on international and regional funds	Tempus (1996) Bologna Process and EHEA (2003) Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (2004) Erasmus Programs (2007) Erasmus+ ICM Program (2014)	113rd country in the list of countries by GDP Transitional, upper middle-income economy	Since 1990s, EU support and economic/financial assistance to encourage institution building and reconstruction of the economy. EU is the largest trading partner and biggest donor of the BiH which provides financial assistance through Phase, OBNOVA, CARDS, IPA etc.	In the process of reconstruction of economy, state and institution building since 1990s, after the Yugoslavian War	Identified as a prospective candidate for the EU membership in 2003 and granted as EU candidate status in 2022. Important partner of the EU in terms of the regional security and stability

Table 4.1 Short Analysis of the Selected Three Countries (Continued).

Country	Higher Education Numbers	Higher Education Administration	Higher Education Funding	EU Higher Education Programs	Economic Status in General	Economic Relations with the EU	Political Status in General	Political Relations with the EU
RoK	~130 HEIs 576.557 students (21-22) ~70 % tertiary education (2020) 8th largest source of internationa l students	Ministry of Education and Science (MES) Renewed strategies to attract international students and staff and make the Kazakhstan an educational hub of the Central Asia	Although still below the level recommended by the UNESCO, government's expenditure on education has increased significantly in recent year. The government provides funding for international studies through Bolashak Scholarship Program, Serpin 1020 etc.	Tempus (1994) Bologna Process and EHEA (2010) Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees Erasmus Programs (2007) Erasmus+ ICM Program (2014)	Largest economy in Central Asia Only state of Central Asia with higher-middle-income level and foreign aid provider (KAZAID) After its independence (1991), Kazakhstan has had a comprehensive reform process to depart from the Soviet legacy and establish a market economy. WTO member (2015)	Especially at the beginning of 1000s, the EU was basically a donor and technical support for Kazakhstan via programs like TACIS, DCI et. One of the major energy suppliers of the EU (3rd largest non-OPEC supplier) EU is the biggest trade partner and foreign investor of Kazakhstan	Post-Soviet country with a political, economic, and sociocultural move to erase Soviet influence and legacy	Not a candidate for EU membership; but indispensable partner of the EU due to its geographical position and transport routes, through Eastern Neighborhood Policy and Black Sea Initiative Enhanced partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 2015, as a first kind in Central Asia

Table 4.1 Short Analysis of the Selected Three Countries (Continued).

Country	Higher Education Numbers	Higher Education Administration	Higher Education Funding	EU Higher Education Programs	Economic Status in General	Economic Relations with the EU (*symmetrical*)	Political Status in General	Political Relations with the EU (*symmetrical*)
PRC	~2756 HEIs 46 million (21-22) ~60% tertiary education (2022) Largest source of international students in the world	State Council, Chinese Ministry of Education and Provincial Governments Not only inward-oriented but also outward-oriented internationalization strategy in higher education referring to the exportation of domestic models, knowledge, philosophies etc. through Confucius Institutes, international aids to developing countries etc.	Government largely invests in higher education via comprehensive projects and offers government scholarship to a number of students and staff for both directions of international studies. China is the 2nd largest budget of research after the USA	Not a member of Bologna Process and EHEA Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (2005) People-to-People Dialogue (2012) Erasmus+ ICM Program (2014)	2nd largest economy of the world After the Open Door Policy, a series of economic reforms for transition from centrally planned and labor-intensive economy to market-oriented and knowledge-based one Integration into the world economy especially after its participation in WTO (1999)	EU is the biggest trading partner of China. China is 3rd largest partner for EU export of goods and the largest partner for EU import of goods. High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (2008)	Dissolution of isolation policy and establishment of Open Door Policy (1978) China's political and economic influence has grown with an unpresented scale in the last decade	Not a candidate for EU membership High Level Strategic Dialogue (2010) A cooperation partner for the EU in different planet-size areas such as climate change; but also, a rival and a challenge to the Europe's very identity who promotes alternative economic and political models

Source: Author's own analysis

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

This study uses a qualitative research method to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of International Office Professionals (IOPs) in three different countries, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, and People's Republic of China, with regards to the first-hand experience with the EU higher education programs and the transfer and implementation of these programs in different institutional and national contexts. This is being said, this chapter describes the research methods in detail, including participant selection for the semi-structured interviews, data collection, analysis techniques, research ethics, validity, reliability, and potential limitations, as well as the reasoning behind the use of a qualitative method.

5.1 Why Qualitative Research Methods?

Qualitative research focuses on in-depth and specific data obtained from smaller study groups rather than large samples; it is a method that is inquisitive, interpretive and strives to understand the problem in its natural environment (Baltacı, 2019). In qualitative research, there is an effort to reach a deep understanding of the event or phenomenon examined. It builds on qualitative data collection techniques such as observations, interviews, document, and discourse analysis. In addition, qualitative research examines the problematic in its own context with an interpretive approach through focusing on the meanings that people attribute (Baltacı, 2019). Contrary to the quantitative research methods, which aim at generalization through large and wide samples to represent the universe, the qualitative research is mostly conducted based on observations and interviews, which provides in-dept experiences and perceptions of a limited number of research sample (Baltacı, 2019). In other words, understanding how individuals interpret their experiences, create their worlds and assign meaning to

them is the focus of qualitative research. As quoted by Merriam (2009), Patton (1985) defines qualitative research as an attempt to comprehend situations in their particularity as a component of a specific context and the interactions therein. It is not an attempt to forecast what might occur in the future, but an end itself which tries to deeply comprehend the nature of the context (Merriam, 2009).

In qualitative research, data collection methods such as observation, structured or semi-structured interview, focus group interview, discourse and text analysis are generally used. In cases where the people's opinions about events and facts, their own experiences, emotional backgrounds, perceptions, and values are tried to be achieved, the interview method is preferred because it provides detailed first-hand information. Interviews are a data collection technique in which the participants in the research sample actively explain their knowledge, feelings and thoughts about the research subject and tell their life story. The purpose of the interview is to reach the inner world of the participants and determine their unique perspectives. Interviewing allows the individual to access unobservable information about the subject under investigation, such as their experiences, attitudes, thoughts, intentions, comments, perceptions, and reactions (Baltacı, 2019), which are indeed not observable directly (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews can also be described as a process of constructing meaning based on social interaction between the interviewer and the participant. In other words, interview is a process that is shaped according to the other person's answers in a conversational manner to obtain perceptions and information from the participant (Polat, 2022).

In qualitative studies, interviews can be divided into un-structured, semi-structured and structured according to the structural features such as standardization in the preparation, organization, ordering and management of questions. It can be divided into different types and named in different ways depending on the technical way of conducting the interview, such as face-to-face, telephone or online interview; or focus group interview and in-depth interview (Polat, 2022). Interviews are a useful tool for investigating how meanings are constructed and contested in natural environments (Cohen et al., 2007 quoted in Alshenqeeti, 2014). This means that the importance of interviews stems from their ability to provide a comprehensive picture, analyze

verbatim and report on the specific perspectives of informants, in addition to allowing interviewees to express themselves freely (Berg, 2007 quoted in Alsgenqeeti, 2014).

Highly Structured/ Standardized	*Semistructured*	*Unstructured/Informal*
• Wording of questions is predetermined • Order of questions is predetermined • Interview is oral form of a written survey • In qualitative studies, usually used to obtain demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity, education, etc.) • Examples: U.S. Census Bureau survey, marketing surveys	• Interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured interview questions • All questions used flexibly • Usually specific data required from all respondents • Largest part of interview guided by list of questions or issues to be explored • No predetermined wording or order	• Open-ended questions • Flexible, exploratory • More like a conversation • Used when researcher does not know enough about phenomenon to ask relevant questions • Goal is learning from this interview to formulate questions for later interviews • Used primarily in ethnography, participant observation, and case study

Figure 5.1 Interview Structure Continuum.

Source: Merriam, Sharan B., (2009). Qualitative Research, A Guide to Design and Implementation, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass (p.89).

The Figure 5.1. shows the interview structure continuum. Whereas the structured interviews are administered through questionnaires with a list of pre-planned questions with no room for additional inquires, an unstructured interview is conducted with little to no organization and does not take into account any pre-conceived notions or theories. In a semi-structured interview, a researcher can incorporate important questions about the subject matter, which also permits both the interviewer and the interviewee to stray in order to thoroughly examine a problem or response (Islam & Faraj Aldaihani, 2022). Semi-structured interviews as the most extensively used interviewing format for qualitative research conducted with individuals or in groups, are typically planned in advance at a specific time and place apart from regular events. Usually, they are structured around a list of open-ended questions that have been pre-

arranged, with additional questions arising from the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee (Dicocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

A research processes is guided by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks selected, which also determine relevant concepts, definition of key variables and research questions, research design, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis techniques and the interpretation of results (Merriam, 2009).

Yin (2016) provides an answer to the question of why qualitative research is useful stating that qualitative research allows to examine the daily lives and thoughts of wide range of individuals in a variety of situations, making it possible to address the contextual richness of these settings. Accurate portraying of the opinions and viewpoints of study participants and to capture their viewpoints becomes important to reach at the meanings that people assign to real-world events by valuing and acknowledging the social, institutional, cultural and environmental contexts in which people's lives are lived (Yin, 2016).

This is being said, this study uses qualitative research method, more specifically a semi-structured interview, to accomplish this complex goal. Understanding the ways in which IOPs in the selected countries interpret, apply and maneuver around the policies of EU higher education programs requires a thorough investigation that delves into individual experiences, subjective interpretations, and contextual subtleties. For this reason, qualitative research is suitable, since it concentrates on comprehending phenomena from the viewpoints of the participants in their natural environments, offering rich, in-depth insights that quantitative approaches frequently overlook. It enables a thorough examination of intricate and nuanced experiences, attitudes and beliefs. In order to collect rich, detailed data required to effectively address the research questions, qualitative research offers the flexibility to delve deeper into the participants' subjective understandings. Moreover, the study covers a wide range of cultural and geographical contexts, with their own distinct higher education environment. These contextual variations can be taken into consideration by researchers thanks to the use of qualitative research methods, especially the semi-structured interviews, offering the flexibility to modify questions to suit the unique

context of each country, while enabling consistent data collection across various settings. Because interviews allow researchers to ask precise questions and elicit specific examples and anecdotes from participants, they are especially effective at gathering this kind of information. By making it easier to find recurring themes and patterns among various HEIs and countries, this approach adds practical context to the analysis.

As explained in the Chapter 2, two fundamental conceptual frameworks, namely Policy Transfer and bottom-up Europeanization (with an actor-focused bottom up and sociological institutionalist framework) serve as the theoretical framework of this dissertation. These frameworks offer a strong lens through which one can examine the dynamics of how higher education initiatives from the EU, like Erasmus+ program is understood, put into practice, and integrated into the institutional and national environments of higher education institutions in three selected countries. These theoretical frameworks are combined with qualitative analysis in order to fully comprehend the complex interactions and results that define the execution of international policies in various educational contexts. In that respect, the combination of these theoretical frameworks and methodological approach, namely qualitative analysis of the thesis is explained as follows.

Firstly, policy transfer framework is highly useful to understand how IOPs adopt policies such as the Erasmus+ program and what adjustments are required to bring them into compliance with local practices. It looks at the reasons behind establishing these rules as well as the difficulties encountered in putting them into practice. It is also useful to understand various mechanism and ways that policies are transferred, including coercive, voluntary, and negotiated transfers, as well as how these methods impact implementation/execution. Policy transfer also serves a useful framework for determining the challenges that IOPs encounter when implementing the EU policies in local contexts, be they procedural, structural, or cultural. In that respect, by supplying comprehensive, contextualized data, qualitative interviews enable an investigation of these facets. Researchers can learn about the varied experiences of adopting policies, the methods used to get past obstacles, and the processes that help or impede the transfer of policies by listening to participant narratives.

Secondly, the Europeanization framework with a particular sociological institutionalist and actor-based bottom-up perspective highlights how proactive local players—like IOPs—are interpreting and modifying the European policies to fit local institutional cultures and practices. IOPs can express their opinions about EU policies, how much they incorporate these policies into their daily work, and how they personally help to adapt and implement these policies through semi-structured interviews. Rich, detailed data that can show how bottom-up processes take place within institutions can be collected using this method. Through qualitative interviews, the relationship between individual agency and structural limitations can be examined in relation to local adaptations of EU policies and the broader institutional frameworks.

As a result, combining qualitative research techniques with the theoretical stances of bottom-up Europeanization and policy transfer offers an organized but adaptable way to study the complicated phenomena that this dissertation aims to understand. Also, it is important to emphasize again that the purpose of this study is to examine IOPs' understanding and interpretation of EU higher education programs, not to measure the effect. Naturally, this leads to the use of a qualitative research design. Moreover, since this study attempts to comprehend context-based variations, rather than universal ones, the bottom-up research design is already applicable and relevant.

The semi-structured interview questions and general protocol were also shaped in large part by these theoretical frameworks. Policy transfer framework contributed to the interview protocol in a way that questions were designed to understand the specific mechanisms through which higher education institutions in the selected countries transfer the EU higher education programs into their distinct educational and institutional systems. In order to gain insight into the process of policy transfer (whether it is a voluntary process or not), the interview protocol included questions asking whether there was a pressure coming from the university administration, governmental bodies or regional authorities. Moreover, policy transfer framework guided the interview protocol in a way that interview questions were asking whether IOPs modified the EU higher education programs to fit domestic educational and cultural needs, what particular adaptations were made and the reasons behind these changes. Furthermore, questions about obstacles and enablers in the policy transfer

process were also included, drawing on the theory of policy transfer. Interviewees were asked about the obstacles they encounter, the tools they used, and the strategies they employed to get past particular problems. Similarly, with an emphasis on bottom-up Europeanization, the interview protocol asked questions about the agency and roles of IOPs in influencing how policies were formulized and implemented at their organizations. This examined how they interacted with higher-level decision-makers, how they affected policy decisions, and how they participated in policy advocacy inside their organizations, with regards to the EU higher education programs.

5.2 Justification for Selected Countries / Higher Education Institutions and International Office Professionals as the Main Unit of Analysis

Due to their distinct geopolitical, cultural, and educational contexts, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) were chosen as case studies for this PhD thesis. These countries offer a rich and varied frameworks for comprehending how International Office Professionals (IOPs) interpret and carry out EU higher education programs.

As explained by Hatipoğlu (2003), selecting cases for analysis is crucial in comparative politics, especially in studies with limited number of cases. Controlling for all possible variables can be challenging, making the choice of cases vital to the study's validity. Two prominent strategies, rooted in the work of 19th century thinker John Stuart Mill, are commonly employed: the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) and the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). The MSSD involves selecting cases that are as similar as possible, differing primarily in the main independent variable. This approach helps isolate the effect of the independent variable by controlling for other similarities. Conversely, the MDSD strategy selects cases that are as different as possible, yet similar concerning the main independent variable. This method tests hypotheses across diverse contexts to identify commonalities linked to the independent variable (Hatipoğlu, 2013).

In this thesis, the selection of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and China aligns more closely with the Most Different Systems Design approach. These countries differ

in various aspects, such as political systems, cultural backgrounds, and levels of economic development. However, they all implement EU higher education programs like Erasmus+ as a part of their internationalization strategies, and for this reason they have established International Offices (IOs) as distinct units within their universities. By employing the MDSD strategy, this study aims to explore how International Office Professionals (IOPs) mediate and implement EU higher education programs (which can be seen as the independent variable) across diverse national contexts. This approach allows for the examination of whether the roles and perceptions of the IOPs exhibit common patterns despite the differing systemic characteristics of each country. Such an analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which internationalization policies are adapted and operationalized in varied institutional and national settings.

In that regard, selecting these three countries provide the research with additional value and a number of important benefits. Each of these three countries possesses particular qualities that set them apart from the others in terms of their political, economic, and historical backgrounds, as well as how they stand in relation to the EU. The internationalization and funding of higher education vary, partly because of their differing collaborations and interactions with the EU, the influence of their respective political and economic structures and their place in and impact on the global power structures. This will allow us to compare and contrast the qualitative data from the interviews.

The uniqueness of these countries also lies in their shorter history of the market economy, later ties to globalization compared to other nations of the world policies and their adaptation of higher education policies in response to the market developments. Moreover, each of countries has a distinct history as they have experienced nearly drastic changes and reforms and for this reason, are more open to attempt novel institutional initiatives. As this thesis aims to understand the context-based variations via bottom-up research design, rather than universal and generalized results, these peculiar and comparable results will work for the purposes of the study.

As a country in the Western Balkans with an official candidacy status for the EU membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) provides an example of a setting in which the EU policies and initiatives have a significant impact. It might be well argued that higher education policies like the Bologna Process are considered as one of the necessary modifications to the EU, and BiH's participation in the EU's higher education program and the transfer of its policies may be linked to membership requirements. Moreover, higher education establishments in BiH, distinguished by their efforts to recover and integrate after the conflict, offer a distinctive setting for researching the difficulties and achievements of executing the EU initiatives in a society undergoing transition.

People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK), in contrast to BiH, are neither candidates for the EU membership nor do they have any intention of joining in the near future. Their economic, political, and geographic make them significant allies of the EU, which also influences ties and cooperation in the field of higher education. From the EU's point of view, Kazakhstan holds a significant position due to its geographic location, significance for regional security, and status as one of the Union's primary energy suppliers. Given that the country's educational institutions are undergoing extensive reforms to bring them into compliance with international standards, RP's participation in the EU programs and attempts to modernize its higher education system provide a unique context for examining the impact of the EU policies in a post-Soviet educational environment.

On the other hand, with its distinct political and educational system, People's Republic of China (PRC) is a significant global power that represents an alternative viewpoint. As the second-largest economy in the world, one the most significant trading partners of the EU as well as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto power, PRC is both a partner but also a rival to the EU not only in the in the political and economic spheres but also in the field of higher education, as it works to increase its influence in culture and education through a variety of policies and initiatives. For the purpose of this thesis, PRC will provide valuable insights into how a non-Western country with highly centralized educational system adapt the EU higher education

programs, given its selective and active engagement with international programs and strong focus on global competitiveness and oversight.

The two most obvious distinctions between these three cases when compared are the investments in higher education specifically and the overall level of economic growth. Because BiH is still developing its state and is in the early phases of a market economy, it is highly dependent on outside donors, especially the EU, for both its post-war reconstruction and its higher education policies. Nonetheless, the Kazakhstani government has been offering state grants and a specific amount of state spending on education to students pursuing higher education, even though this is still less than the ideal rate recommended by UNESCO. China, the second-biggest economy in the world and the EU's second-biggest trading partner after the USA, invests billions of dollars in massive projects and programs and offers a plethora of scholarship opportunities for international studies, both domestically and abroad. Consequently, since PRC and RK already have limited scholarship programs of their own (although it is still quite limited in RK), it is expected that the interviewees from these countries will cite additional motivations in addition to the Erasmus+ Program grant.

Furthermore, the quantity of internationalization endeavors and postsecondary education programs in these countries is also verified. The three nations differ in terms of population and investment levels, which in turn affects the number of higher education institutions and students enrolled in HEIs. The PRC has more than 2750 higher education institutions as a result of massifying higher education at the end of the 1990s to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding economy, compared to about 130 universities in the RK and about 50 in the BiH. In terms of internationalization, the RP seems to be pursuing a more assertive government policy than the BiH in an effort to attract international students and position its education system as the hub for Central Asia. The PRC, on the other hand, has adopted an even more assertive strategy (particularly since the 2000s), which consists of the establishment of the Study in China Initiative, the creation of HEI branches abroad, the utilization of the influence of Confucius Institutes, and the provision of international development aid to developing nations. In this sense, China is actively pursuing an outward-oriented internationalization strategy in contrast to Kazakhstan and Bosnia, in order to export

Chinese culture, models, language, etc., especially with the assistance of Confucius Institutes that have been established almost everywhere in the world. However, it also closely adheres to the practices of European and Western higher education models by participating in Bologna Process forums.

In addition to why these three countries were chosen to be analyzed within the scope of the thesis, it is also critical to explain why certain higher education institutions in these countries were invited to participate in this study and interview. For the purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews with International Office Professionals, particular higher education institutions in BiH, RK and PRC were deliberately chosen. This decision is motivated by a number of factors, all of which have a major impact on this thesis's research goals. These variables include the institutions' degree of internationalization, their current collaborations and their English-language communication skills and responsiveness.

The PhD student conducting this research is also a full-time employee at the Middle East Technical University (METU) International Cooperation Office (ICO). For this reason, first of all, institutions that already have a relationship and agreement with METU are chosen in order to take advantage of the established channels of trust and communication. Additionally, since METU ICO is already familiar with these institutions and has knowledge of the procedures and difficulties these partner HEIs encounter in overseeing their international programs, these collaborations may yield additional data points by providing a more thorough understanding of the inter-institutional dynamics as well. In addition to the institutions with whom METU already has partnership, international offices of other higher education institutions in Türkiye were asked to forward the invitation to their partners. Furthermore, the METU Confucius Center and also faculty members who work closely with the region (e.g., in the graduate program of Asian Studies) were contacted to request assistance, for example, in China, which is more difficult to communicate with.

Moreover, the researcher tried to reach out institutions that were highly listed in international ranking systems and thus having a high internationalization capacity. Besides, one of the important factors affecting the viability of conducting interviews

and ensuring the accuracy of data collection is these institutions' ability to communicate clearly in English. Hence, selecting institutions that respond to inquiries in English reduced language barriers, improving the precision and caliber of the information gathered. Considering that even some international office staff may not consider their English proficiency as enough in terms of speaking, the institutions that responded to the researcher's invitation and their responsiveness were also seen as a positive sign regarding the institution's internationalization capacity. It was assumed that the institutions that were especially accessible in the People's Republic of China were already at a high level of internationalization. Lastly, selected universities are the ones having official and active international offices responsible for international and/or the EU higher education programs; this is an important criterion considering that some institutions do not have units dealing with such programs specifically, rather Admission Offices or Student Affairs Offices are dealing with international and/or the EU programs in addition to their regular duties.

Finally, it is essential to state why International Office Professionals (IOPs) were chosen as the unit of analysis in addition to the countries and institutions determined within the scope of the study. As explained earlier, the research offered in this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding on how IOPs working in the above-mentioned countries and higher education institutions perceive, understand, respond to, and implement the processes and policies of the EU higher education programs, in their distinctive domestic and institutional contexts. This being said, as illustrated in the figure below, IOPs are chosen as the main unit of analysis, due to their crucial function in overseeing and carrying out international programs in HEIs. In this research design, administration of the HEIs is accepted as the medium analysis level, while national authorities such as the Ministry of Education, Higher Education Council are treated as higher levels of analysis and regional and international authorities such as the European Commission are recognized as the top level of analysis.

If we portray the IOPs as the basic unit of our analysis, even their title varies in different institutions (i.e. Senior International Officers, International Office Professionals etc.), almost all IOPs act as a link between the institutions' internal operations and the outside world of higher education, especially when it comes to

cross-border academic exchanges and cooperation like those made possible by the EU higher education initiatives like the Erasmus+. International education policies are operationalized with direct involvement from IOPs. These covers handling the academic, administrative, and regulatory facets in addition to interpreting and modifying these policies in light of the institutional and national context.

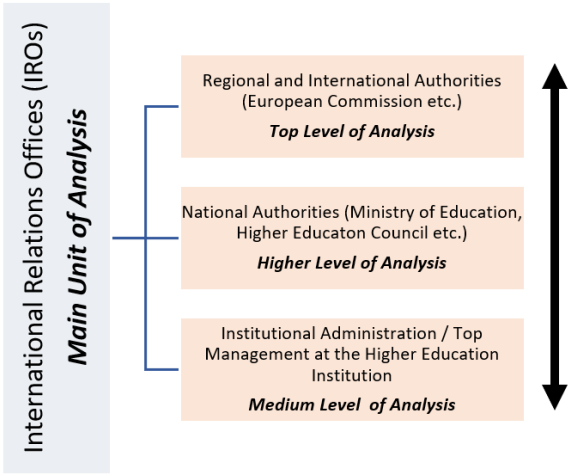


Figure 5.2 Analysis Levels for EU Higher Education Programs.

Possessing specialized knowledge about a variety of international education frameworks and systems, IOPs are experts that can provide significant insights into how programs like the Erasmus are viewed and carried out at institutional levels, because they are usually well-informed about the standards, prerequisites, and goals of these kinds of initiatives. Because of their front-time position (because of which they are named as “street-level bureaucrats” by authors such as Bulut Sahin, 2023), professionals working in the international offices of HEIs face a variety of unique problems such as integrating international standards, navigating cultural differences, and overcoming administrative obstacles. Hence, international offices might be described as highly skilled units with multilingual and qualified staff that handle tasks outside of their regular duties. In terms of the organizational structure, international offices might be described as both administrative and academic unit which has both national and also international works, partnerships, and contacts.

International officers who already collaborate and share knowledge with the overseas institutions and take part in various international forums (e.g. international and regional university organizations such as Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe/UNICA and European University Association/EUA) and are more inclined to travel abroad (e.g. through staff mobility programs, international education fairs and partner visits), play an instrumental role in guiding and enabling the policy transfer processes by advising their superiors about how to align strategies and practices of their institutions with the policies and trends around the world. Nevertheless, international office staff are not completely freed from the context-bounded settings where institutional structure and culture advance accordingly and their perceptions as well as decisions might be still impacted by their working environment (Bulut Şahin, et al., 2023).

On the other hand, international officers are responsible for implementing the policies transmitted by international organizations and memberships, governments and other governmental bodies (e.g. YÖK and Turkish National Agency in the case of Türkiye) and university administrations. While dealing with the implementation process, they differ from other administrative units and staff of HEIs such as secretaries or clerks, as the most senior, innovative and unique professionals at a university as claimed by (Tran, Lacost, & Grady, 2020), who also tend to have academic degrees in most of the time. According to Tran et al. (2020), because the field of international education and creation of international offices in the higher education- mostly dating back to 1990s, international officers are distinctive professionals, who must be adaptable to the ever-developing practices of international education, specific needs and global trends. With this regard, international officers work in many facets of internationalization, managing international projects, developing internationalization policies, managing mobility, and handling anything else that is deemed international. They work in universities in a range of capacities as brokers, bureaucrats, mediators, mentors, entrepreneurs, or innovators (Bulut Şahin, et al., 2023). Within the organizational hierarchy of the HEIs, IOPs accelerate the policy transfer opportunities by acting as a bridge between their institutions and outside partners such as governments, international/regional organizations, and their counterparts. However, they mostly do

not have a direct authority on the process of policy making and policy transfer and report to the President or related Provost of the institution.

Finally, it should be noted that the selection of IOPs as the basic unit of analysis is also related to the researcher's current professional background. As an international office professional who has almost 10 years of experience and output on how this process is experienced in Türkiye and who occasionally meets with her national and international counterparts, my initial expectations for this study were shaped by my own professional background. Having observed how EU programs are interpreted and implemented within Turkish higher education institutions, I was particularly curious to explore how international office professionals in other countries perceive and interpret these programs within their own institutional and national contexts. This curiosity stemmed from a desire to understand the nuances and variations in their approaches, influenced by their countries' specific socio-political, economic, and cultural frameworks. In this regard, my position as an international office professional in another national and institutional context, rather than an external observer, profoundly shaped this research. This was not a topic I approached from a distance; rather, it was something I knew deeply and personally. As a result, I was able to create certain codes and sub-themes with relative ease because they resonated with my own experiences. This familiarity allowed me to identify and structure the data more intuitively in some cases, especially when participants' perspectives aligned with situations I had also encountered. However, this also required careful self-reflection to ensure that my interpretations were grounded on the data and not overly influenced by my own professional background.

5.3 Interview Protocol

It is critical to note that the research questions and interview questions are not identical. Interview questions should be specific questions focused on the participants' own experiences rather than the abstract, deductive, cause-and-effect pattern-seeking aspect of the research question. Therefore, when the researcher prepares the interview questions, it is necessary to translate the abstract, academic, and theoretical language

of the research question into a concrete, understandable, simple and everyday language that the participants have based on their own life experiences (Polat, 2022). For this reason, theoretical concepts such as Europeanization were not added to the questions and the researcher provided additional explanations during the interviews to make the questions more understandable.

It is also important that the questions should not be too broad and general; but rather understandable. It does not test the knowledge of the participants and the aim is to discover the participant's practical, interpretive, and experiential narratives rather than bookish and theoretical knowledge. It should be ensured that the interview questions are related to each other and that questions related to the same dimension are asked consecutively. The interview should have a logical and narrative consistency and flow (Polat, 2022).

The framework of the protocol was developed with the help of the literature review and related studies conducted in the field. The initial version of the interview protocol was prepared by the researcher. After being assessed several times, some questions were modified, while some of them were either erased or combined with other questions. In order to create the final protocol, the expert opinions were also gathered from the jury members through physical meetings and via e-mails.

In order to obtain comprehensive information on a number of important subjects, including opinions of EU education programs, tactics for implementing policies, difficulties faced, and the impact of institutional and national contexts on policy practices, the interview protocol consists of a series of open-ended questions. With the purpose of providing more in-depth thought and clarification on particular topics, the protocol also includes cues for follow-up questions.

Interview protocol includes six parts, 21 main questions and 16 sub-questions in total. The first part of the interview protocol, questions from 1 to 8, are asked to gather demographic data. The second part, questions from 9 to 12, aims to understand the structure of the host institution and its international offices, its institutional history, current status, basic duties and responsibilities, and its relations with other units of the

University, its administration, and other international offices in the country. The third part of the interview questionnaire, questions 13 and 14, is designed to comprehend the perception of the IOPs with regards to the EU programs through the internationalization strategy of the host institution, the role of the EU programs in these strategies and the workload of the international office, and the main motivations behind the host institution's involvement in the EU programs. The fourth part, questions from 15 to 17 is prepared to understand the place of the EU programs in national strategies, the role of international offices in the transfer of the EU programs as well as the decision-making processes led by university administration and national authorities regarding these programs, from the eyes of the IOPs in more detail. The fifth part, questions 18 and 19 aims to detain the viewpoints of IOPs about the implementation of the EU programs within domestic institutional and national contexts, with possible modifications and domestic filters as well as the legal and institutional difficulties that might be faced during the execution of these programs. The final section of the interview protocol, questions 20 and 21 is designed as closure part. The interview language was English as the interview was conducted with participants from three different countries.

5.4 The Research Sample

In qualitative research, sample selection is typically (though not always) smaller, deliberate, and non-random compared to quantitative research, which uses larger, more random sampling. In qualitative research, the researcher typically spends a significant amount of time in the study's natural environment or the "field", frequently interacting closely with participants. Samples can be divided into two categories: probability and non-probability. For the majority of the qualitative research, non-probability sampling is the preferred technique; this type is most frequently referred to as purposive or purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling relies on the premise that the researcher wishes to learn as much as possible from the sample in order to gain understanding, insights and discoveries (Merriam, 2009).

This is being said, the IOPs employed at the HEIs in the designated countries make up the study's main sample. A purposeful sampling technique is utilized, for the selection of participants who either implement the EU higher education programs at their own institution or are aware of these programs. The researcher used a range of channels and recourses to contact with the sampling group and the potential participants. As a result, 13 IOPs employed at 13 different institutions-3 institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4 institutions from the Republic of Kazakhstan and 6 institutions from the Peoples' Republic of China were interviewed. While determining the number of institutions and IOPs to be interviewed, the population rates of the countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina: 3,164,253; Republic of Kazakhstan: 20,592, 571; People's Republic of China: 1,419,321, 278 as of 2024) and the number of higher education institutions (Bosnia and Herzegovina: 45; Republic of Kazakhstan: 112; People's Republic of China: 2740 as of the 2023-2024 academic year) were also taken into account. The distribution of interviews by country and other demographic details are given in the table below.

Table 5.1 List of Interviewees.

COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	NATIONALITY	AGE	GENDER	DEPARTMENT/UNIT	TITLE	SENIORITY	ESTABLISHMENT YEAR OF THE INSTITUTION	TYPE OF THE INSTITUTION	COMPOSITON OF THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Institution B1	Bosniak	49	Female	International Relations Office	Coordinator	16 years	1977	Public	1 staff and 2 student assistans
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Institution B2	Republic of Srpska	45	Female	International Cooperation Office	Coordinator	15 years	1992	Public	2 staff
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Institution B3	Bosniak	42	Male	International Relations Office	Senior International Relations Expert	15 years	1949	Public	2 staff
Republic of Kazakhstan	Institution K1	Kazakh	31	Female	International Office	Director	5 years	2009	Private	4 staff
Republic of Kazakhstan	Institution K2	Kazakh	41	Female	International Office	Director	17 years	1992	Private	3 staff
Republic of Kazakhstan	Institution K3	Kazakh	27	Female	International Office and Stategic Development Office	Head of the International Office	2 years	2001	Private	1 staff for International Office and 2 staff for Strategic Development Office
Republic of Kazakhstan	Institution K4	Kazakh	28	Female	International Development and Partnerships Office	Senior Coordinator	5-6 months	1963	Private	2 divisions: 2 coordinators for the office of international students and staff-1 director and 2 coordinator for the office of partnerships and academic mobility (5 staff in total)
People's Republic of China	Institution C1	Chinese	36	Male	College of International Cooperation and Exchanges, Office of International Cooperation and Exchanges	Assoc. Prof., Deputy Director and Vice Dean	5-6 months	1932	Public	5 staff
People's Republic of China	Institution C2	Chinese	50	Female	International Cooperation Unit	Director	25 years	1955	Public	5 staff
People's Republic of China	Institution C3	Chinese	35	Female	School of Department of Education	Short Term Program Officer for International Students	6 years	1949	Public	15 staff
People's Republic of China	Institution C4	Chinese	35	Female	Institute of Higher Education	Assistant Professor	3 years	1907	Public	10 staff
People's Republic of China	Institution C5	Chinese	49	Female	Office of International Cooperation and Exchange	Executive Director	20 years	1921	Public	18 staff
People's Republic of China	Institution C6	Chinese	43	Male	International Affairs Office	Deputy Director of International Affairs Office	22 years	1927	Public	9-10 staff

Once we look at the demographic information of the interviewees, they are generally middle-aged participants, the oldest being 50 and the youngest being 27 years old, and the average age of the participants is 39. Moreover, the majority of the participants were female, as 10 of the 13 people interviewed were female and three were male, female domination seems interesting.

Table 5.2 Gender-Based Distribution of Interviewees.

COUNTRY	GENDER
Republic of Kazakhstan	4 Female
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2 Female & 1 Male
People's Republic of China	4 Female & 2 Male
10 Female & 3 Male in total	

Additionally, regarding the seniority of the interviewees in the field of internationalization, it is seen that they have varying seniority periods, with the most senior having 25 years and the least senior having half a year experience, and the average seniority is 11 years.

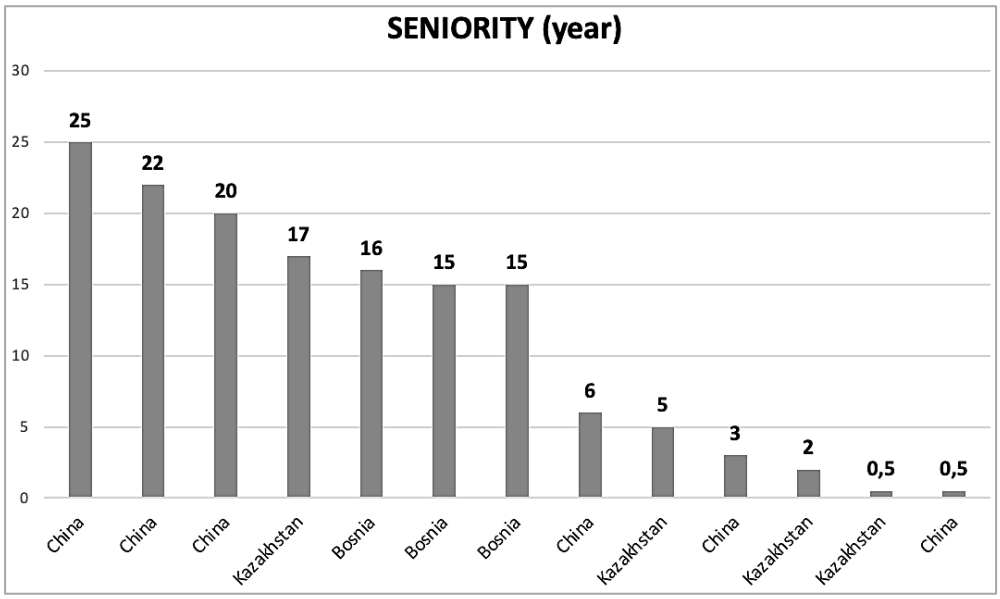


Figure 5.3 Seniority Distribution of Interviewees.

Lastly, when the establishment years of the participants' institutions are examined, there are institutions with varying establishment years, with the oldest being established in 1907 and the newest in 2009. It is seen that 11 of the 13 institutions were established before the 2000s, and two are relatively newer institutions being established after the 2000s.

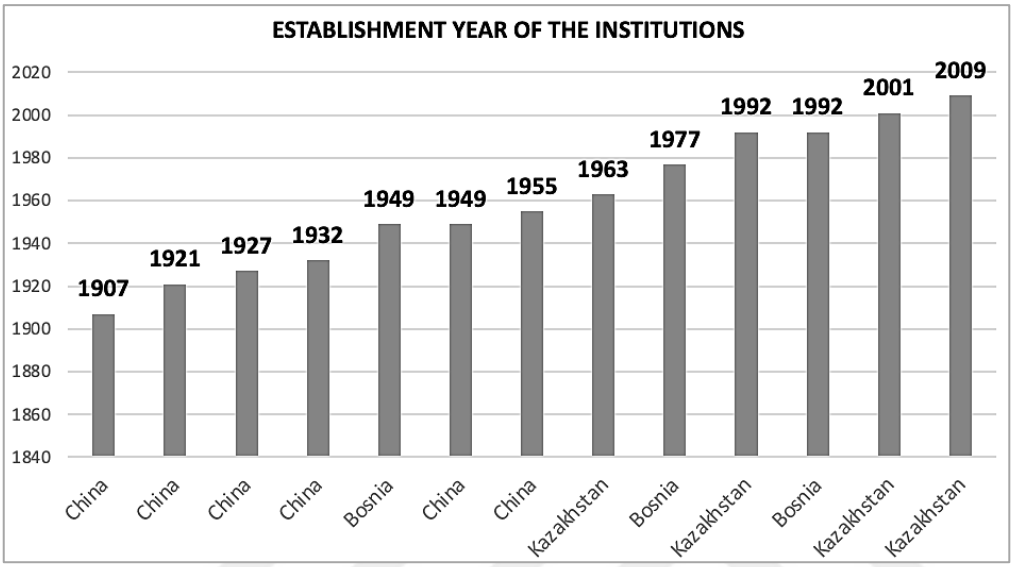


Figure 5.4 Establishment Year of the Institutions.

5.5 Data Collection

As this thesis focuses on the IOPs employed at the HEIs located in three selected countries, conducting physical meetings were not feasible. For this reason, the data collection was conducted via online platforms, namely Zoom software program which allows participants geographical dispersion and flexibility in scheduling, considering that the selected countries and the home country of the researcher-Türkiye are in different time zones.

Qualitative data was collected in the period of August-November 2024. Participants were informed in the invitation text and at the beginning of the interview that the interview would be video recorded. A total of 618 minutes of video interviews were recorded during the field work, and the interviews lasted an average of 51,5 minutes.

The longest interview lasted 80 minutes, while the shortest interview was 40 minutes. Interview records and videos were transcribed verbatim and transferred to written format by using a software program called as Otter.ai.

5.6 Data Analysis

One of the most essential steps in qualitative research is the analysis of qualitative data which requires closer attention and time. As suggested by the literature of qualitative research analysis, there are basically two types of qualitative analysis; inductive analysis which is the foundation of approaches like grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and thematic analysis; and deductive analysis which is the foundation of different techniques such as content analysis and program evaluation.

In deductive or a priori analysis, codes are created before data analysis and then applied to the data. Using deductive analysis, data can be arranged or sorted into predefined categories derived from theory or literature (Bingham, 2023). In other words, the deductive approach is kind of a top-down method predefining codes by going from the general topic to specifics (Bihu, 2024). On the other hand, inductive analysis involves the researcher identifying and naming words, codes, and categories as they are found in the data, rather than predetermined. Inductive analysis often uses initial or open coding, through which researchers find and label key ideas and trends in the data (Bingham, 2023). Instead of coming from preconceived notions or models, inductive analysis derives its conclusions directly from the examination of the unprocessed data. It involves going through the data line by line and giving codes to text passages or paraphrases as visualized in Figure 5.5. (Azungah, 2018). However, in most of the qualitative data analyses, deductive and inductive coding methods are used together, which is called as hybrid or abductive coding. This study also applies hybrid coding method, which means that it uses both codes coming from theoretical frameworks as well as the ones brought from the raw data itself. My initial analysis was guided by the research questions, interview questions and the theoretical frameworks of policy transfer and Europeanization (sociological institutionalist and bottom-up approach). For instance, the theme of “Motivations of Participations in the

EU Higher Education Programs" is derived from the question of "why transfer" in Policy Transfer Framework developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000). Similarly, the theme of "Legal and Institutional Difficulties" is derived from the "constraints of transfer" developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) in the same framework. However, in the later parts of the analysis, the coding derived from the data itself also guided this study. For instance, although different elements of policy transfer framework guided the theme of "Motivations of Participations in the EU Higher Education Programs", the data itself allowed me to reach sub-themes such as "Institutional Motivations", "Financial Motivations", "Individual Motivations" and even more specific and unique sub-themes such as "Social/Cultural/Political Motivation". Consequently, the analysis was carried out via the complementary use of deductive and inductive coding systems. It is also important to mention that, despite the significance of theoretical framework, the coding coming directly from the responses of the actors at the bottom is inevitable part of this process, since this study is inherently bottom-up.

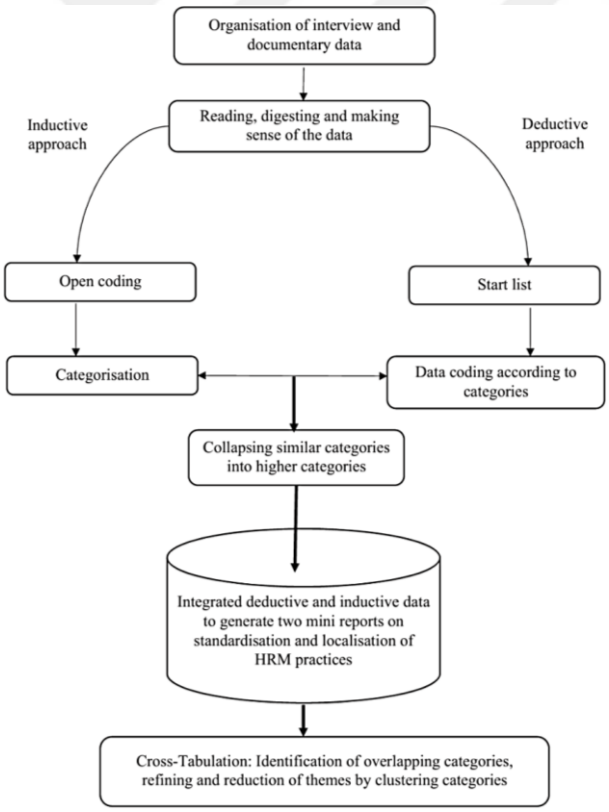


Figure 5.5 Preparation, Organization and Data Analysis Process.

Source: (Azungah, 2018: 392).

To be able to analyze the data derived from the semi-structured interviews, I initially reviewed each transcript individually, identifying and extracting responses to my questions within each text. Rather than aggregating responses across all texts by question, I systematically examined each transcript from beginning to end, allowing me to recognize the document and pertinent answers. During this review, I worked on documents in Microsoft Word using the markup method. This process enabled me to organize the data within each transcript, followed by sorting responses into relevant topical categories in a consolidated table, in Microsoft Excel tables, where I could compare responses to the same question across institutions. As I could see the answers given by all institutions to the same question in a single Microsoft Excel table, I was able to sort the data into relevant topical categories and sub-themes.

After sorting the data in the Microsoft Excel document, I started to line by line coding manually, which allowed me to analyze the sorting, sub-themes and codes in detail by going back to the beginning and checking the same lines again and again. A sample of line-by-line coding created manually for the theme of "Relations with Other International Offices in the Same Country" is presented at the table below.

Table 5.3 Sample of Line-by-Line Coding.

Theme: Relations with other international offices in the same country		
UNIVERSITY	**INTERVIEW QUOTATIONS**	**PROMINENT SUB-THEMES & CODES**
REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN		
Institution 1	Cooperation because we accept incoming students from many local universities. We have some joint conferences; we have a network and daily contact	**Cooperative Relationship** -cooperation, internal exchange, conference, network, daily contact
Institution 2	It depends to be honest. For example, we have ministry grant. Some uniersity get more money, some universities get less money. But mostly it is like cooperative. We have students who went to study fot one semester in Institution 2; it is not even another city in XXX.	**Cooperative Relationship** -cooperative, internal exchange, **Competitive Relationship** -some universities may get more money
Institution 3	We do exchange not only with abroad partner universities but we also do exchange within the country. It is not like competition, it is like we gain so much if we are all together. If we have a critical question, I can directly ask my colleagues	**Cooperative Relationship** -internal exchange,not like competition
Institution 4	We have relationship with other universities in terms of internal exchange program. I have never considered them as a competitor. I guess, it is bad from other side, because when you have a competition, you are more motivated	**Cooperative Relationship** -internal exchange
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA		
Institution 1	It is not competition, at least not for us. We all cooperated in one capacity building project. I would not say we are on daily basis communicating, but definitelty weekly or monthly or when something is needed. We have a very complex government here and structure when it comes to education, everything is on the lower level. It is not on the national level, but lower level. So we kind of depend on each other. We are not program country, but partner country. So we are still not in that process of competing. I am sure there will be some way of competition in the future, but for now, lets say calm, peace	**Cooperative Relationship** -not competition, -weekly/monthly commmunicating **No presence of competition due to being a program country rather than partner country** -not program country **Closer relations at the lower level due to complex governmental structure** -lower level depend on each other
Institution 2	International staff week we do together with University of xxx. I am in a daily contact with them. I have a very good relation. It is cooperation, because I can never compare to the University of xxx, I am small medium-sized university	**Cooperative Relationship** -do together, daily contact, good relation, cooperation
Institution 3	We are connected and personally know each other. Usually we are not in competitive situation, we mainly participate together in many projects and programs	**Cooperative Relationship** -connected, know each other, participate together

In order to continue my analysis in a more systematic manner after the manual coding, I transferred my data to a software program called MAXQDA24. I utilized MAXQDA24 since these tools have strong features that make managing data sets easier, help in identifying patterns and relationships in the data, and enhance the way research findings are presented.

I used the MAXQDA system to classify and label data based on themes, topics, or patterns by assigning codes that I had previously created in Microsoft Excel tables to the pertinent paragraphs.

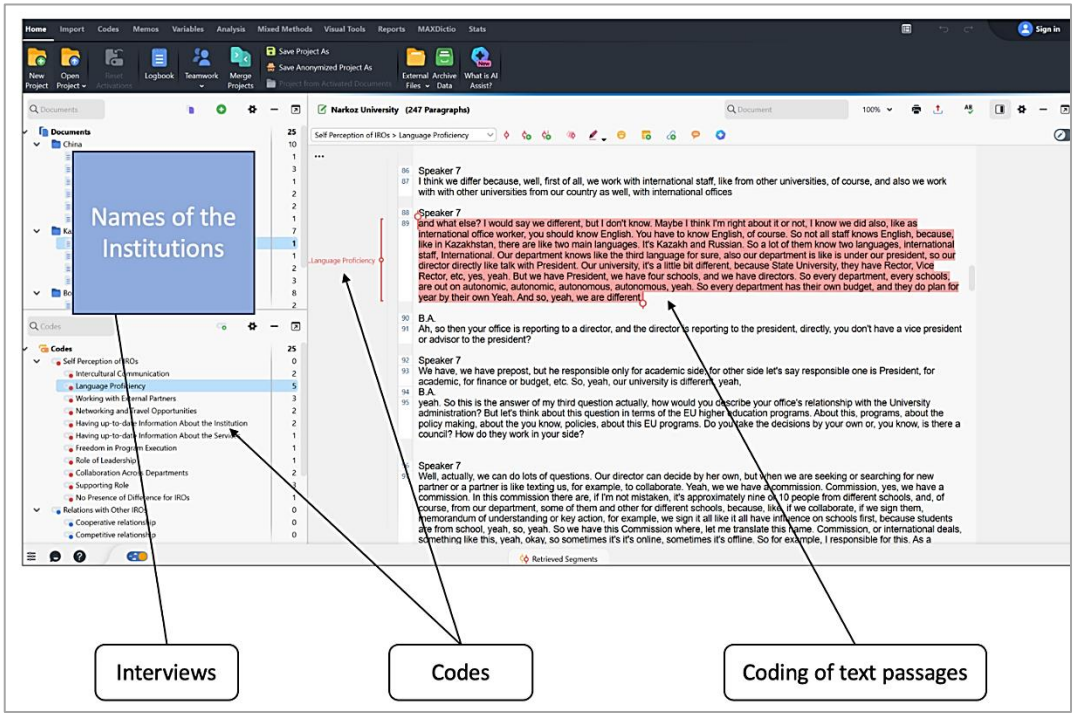


Figure 5.6 Sample of Coding System at MAXQADA System.

At the end, I was able to analyze the data more readily, methodically, and visually, with the help of visuals such as code hierarchy, code frequency, word clouds, and max maps that MAXQADA system generated.

5.7 Validity and Reliability of the Study

In order to compare and cross-verify the validity and consistency, the data was collected from various IOPs at various times, across several higher education institutions and three different countries, which is also known as “data triangulation”. To gather viewpoints that might present conflicting or contradicting arguments, IOPs from a variety of higher education institutions were chosen and invited to be part of this research. As a result, IOPs of varying seniorities and ages from a range of institutions—public and private universities, technical and comprehensive universities as well as those with specialized fields, small and large institutions, newly established universities as well as those with a long history—participated in the interviews.

Moreover, making sure the methodology is consistent and repeatable in similar circumstances is essential for reliability in qualitative research. For this purpose, a consistent and well-documented interview protocol was used (see the Appendix), comprising the questions to ask and the steps to take when conducting semi-structured interviews. Thanks to this documentation, a different researcher could follow the same steps in a similar situation and get results that are comparable. Additionally, in order to verify the interpretations of the data, the analysis process was conducted methodically using coding, categorization, and theme development; each step was duly recorded and backed up by direct quotes taken from the interview data.

It is also critical to mention that due to the difficulty of reaching participants from three different countries, a pilot study could not be conducted in these countries. However, in order to ensure the validity of the interview, the researcher conducted pilot studies with the four members of METU International Cooperation Office, where she is currently employed, as well as a staff member working in the international office of Ankara Music and Fine Arts University.

Lastly, to ensure a reliable and accurate translation, the researcher double-checked the video translation even though the video recordings were automatically transferred into written form using a computer-based tool.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are essential, for study's having the high standards of integrity and respect for the interviewees. The ethical principles are critical in nearly all social science research, specifically qualitative studies including human participants. In that respect, the following principles and guidelines of ethics were applied while organizing semi-structured interviews.

First of all, the research proposal, a comprehensive plan for ethical considerations including data collection instruments and all other application documents for ethical authorization were submitted to the METU Human Research Ethics Committee, where the researcher is registered as a Doctoral student. Following the Committee's assessment, this study was given ethical approval through a protocol no 0452-ODTUİAEK-2024 presented in Appendix.

Afterwards, every participant received a comprehensive e-mail regarding the aim of the research, the extent of their participation as well as the anticipated length of the interview. All this communication was provided through the official university e-mail addresses of both the researcher and the interviewees. The question form of the interview was also shared with the participants in advance, if they requested. Additionally, interviewees were also informed that participation in this study is completely voluntary, and they could leave the study any time without any repercussions. For this purpose, participants were also given voluntary participation forms-or informed consent forms as also known (see Appendix), which they were asked to read and sign in order to confirm that they voluntarily agreed to take part in this research. Since this study aims to conduct interview with the participants from three different countries, consent forms were provided in English, as a common language for both the participants and the researcher.

Moreover, all participants were informed through initial e-mails and then reminded at the beginning of the interviews that the conversations would be recorded. Hence, all interviews were recorded with the notification and confirmation of the participations.

All video records and their transcripts will be safely kept and stored at the researcher's own password-protected software tools and laptop.

Lastly, in order to preserve their privacy, each participant's identifiable data was kept strictly confidential. During the analysis and reporting phases, the gathered information was anonymized to prevent participant identity from appearing in any publication or presentation of the thesis.

5.9 Limitations of the Study

There are inherent limitations to every research that could impact the extent of its conclusions and findings. In order to properly interpret the results and comprehend the context in which the findings should be applied, it is essential to acknowledge these limitations.

The restricted generalizability of qualitative research, as it is the case in this study, is one of the main limitations. The study is limited by the context in which it is conducted, and its conclusions may not be generalized to other regions or institutions that do not share the same circumstances. It focuses on IOPs from particular institutions in three selected countries. These countries' distinct political, cultural, and educational environments have an impact on how policies are understood and carried out, which can vary greatly from other settings. In that respect, this study includes the potential limitations such as the risk of probable biases arising from self-reporting of the participants and the subjective nature of the data gathered through qualitative study. Since the majority of the data used in this study is self-reported, participants might censor their words or provide data which they think socially acceptable. Moreover, one of the most critical limitations of the study is that the language of the interviews was English; it became difficult for both the participants and the researcher to explain the participants' views and ideas comprehensively and deeply in English, which is not their native language, and for the researcher to make the questions more understandable by giving examples. The participants may have lost meaning when they expressed a detail in English that they could express better in their native language. In addition, it is thought that the fact that they will express themselves using

a language other than their native language also guided the participants in deciding whether or not to participate in the interview.

Additionally, since the interviews are conducted virtually, data collection may be impacted by possible technological constraints. They include problems with internet access, poor audio or video quality, and the drawbacks of not being able to read nonverbal cues as well as in-person interviews. Even though it is rare, some interviews were interrupted due to poor internet access, but they were covered immediately. Still, especially for interviews with virtual tools, there is this potential that the richness of the data gathered may be impacted by technological limitations. Another limitation of using online tools is that since the interviews were conducted with participants from three different countries, not every technological tool or software program was available and accessible in every country. For instance, applications such as Zoom are not widely available in the People's Republic of China. Another notable limitation relates to the types of institutions included in the study. Of the 13 institutions interviewed, nine were state universities and four were private universities. Interestingly, within each country, interviews were conducted exclusively with either state institutions or private institutions, and no country included representatives from both types simultaneously. Specifically, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, all interviewees were from private institutions, whereas in the other two countries, all participants represented state universities. This imbalance was not a deliberate choice but rather a coincidence stemming from the available sample This sampling pattern also highlights a limitation in terms of institutional diversity.

COUNTRY	TYPE OF THE INSTITUTION
Republic of Kazakhstan	4 Private Institutions
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3 Public Institutions
People's Republic of China	6 Public Institutions
9 Public, 4 Private in total	

Figure 5.7 Type of the Higher Education Institutions.

It is also critical to mention that since educational policies are dynamic, particularly when applied internationally, the study's conclusions may be impacted by ongoing modifications. For example, at the beginning of this thesis, there was a global pandemic of Covid-19, and all mobility programs came to a standstill and almost all international offices switched to working from home. After the pandemic ended, mobility numbers started to increase again, and international programs started to revive and return to their old state. It is thought that the interview responses received in the pandemic environment would be very different from the interview responses received in the post-pandemic environment. Therefore, it is obvious that the national, regional and global conditions of the time are also of great importance.

Some research findings may become less relevant or timely by the time the study is finished because of changes in how EU programs are interpreted and implemented during the study. These restrictions will be recognized, and steps will be taken to lessen their influence on the findings of the study.

5.10 Research Design

As outlined in earlier sections of this dissertation, this study integrates two theoretical frameworks—policy transfer framework and the bottom-up Europeanization (within the umbrella of sociological institutionalism) perspective. While the detailed rationale for selecting these frameworks and their respective components has been extensively discussed, this section will not repeat their theoretical content to avoid redundancy.

Instead, this subsection aims to provide a theoretical and conceptual transition to the analysis of the qualitative data. To facilitate this transition, the table based on Dolowitz and Marsh's (1996, 2000) policy transfer framework is presented below, indicating the dimensions of the framework and the potential contribution of bottom-up Europeanization in providing additional explanatory power. At this stage, the table remains in its initial, unfilled form, without integrating the findings from the qualitative data. The purpose of presenting this unfilled table is to establish a structured foundation for analysis, illustrating the theoretical alignment of the study with the chosen frameworks. In the conclusion chapter of the dissertation, the table will be

revisited in a way to incorporate the findings from the qualitative data, with the aim to highlight the dimensions of the framework which are addressed by the qualitative data and where the inclusion of bottom-up Europeanization contributes significantly to the interpretation of the results, particularly in areas requiring a more actor-centered and context-specific approach.

The "Why transfer?" question in Dolowitz and Marsh's policy transfer framework is expected to be highly explanatory in understanding why IOPs and HEIs participate in the EU programs. It effectively captures the motivations behind their engagement, distinguishing whether the process has been voluntary or driven by coercive pressures. The "Who is involved in transfer?" question is adopted for its ability to reveal the critical roles of the IOPs in the transfer process. Their expertise, advisory functions, and guiding roles are considered to be critical in shaping how the EU programs have been adapted and implemented, underscoring their significance as mediators in this context. The "What is transferred?" question is adopted to analyze the specific EU higher education programs and tools that are being transferred, such as curriculum updates, quality assurance measures, and mobility schemes. Similarly, the "From where?" question provides valuable insights into the origins of these transfers, highlighting the European Union as a primary source, while also acknowledging the role of other national and international actors.

The "Degrees of transfer?" question denotes the importance of assessing the extent to which the EU programs have been directly adopted or have been adapted to the local contexts. This dimension allows for an understanding of the nuanced processes of inspiration, emulation, and partial adoption. Finally, the "Constraints on transfer" question is instrumental for explaining the limitations and challenges encountered during the transfer process, such as structural barriers, institutional capacity issues, and governance complexities, making it a critical and adopted component of the framework.

On the other hand, two questions in the original work of Dolowitz and Marsh, namely "How transfer leads to policy failure" and "How to demonstrate policy transfer," are not elaborated in the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

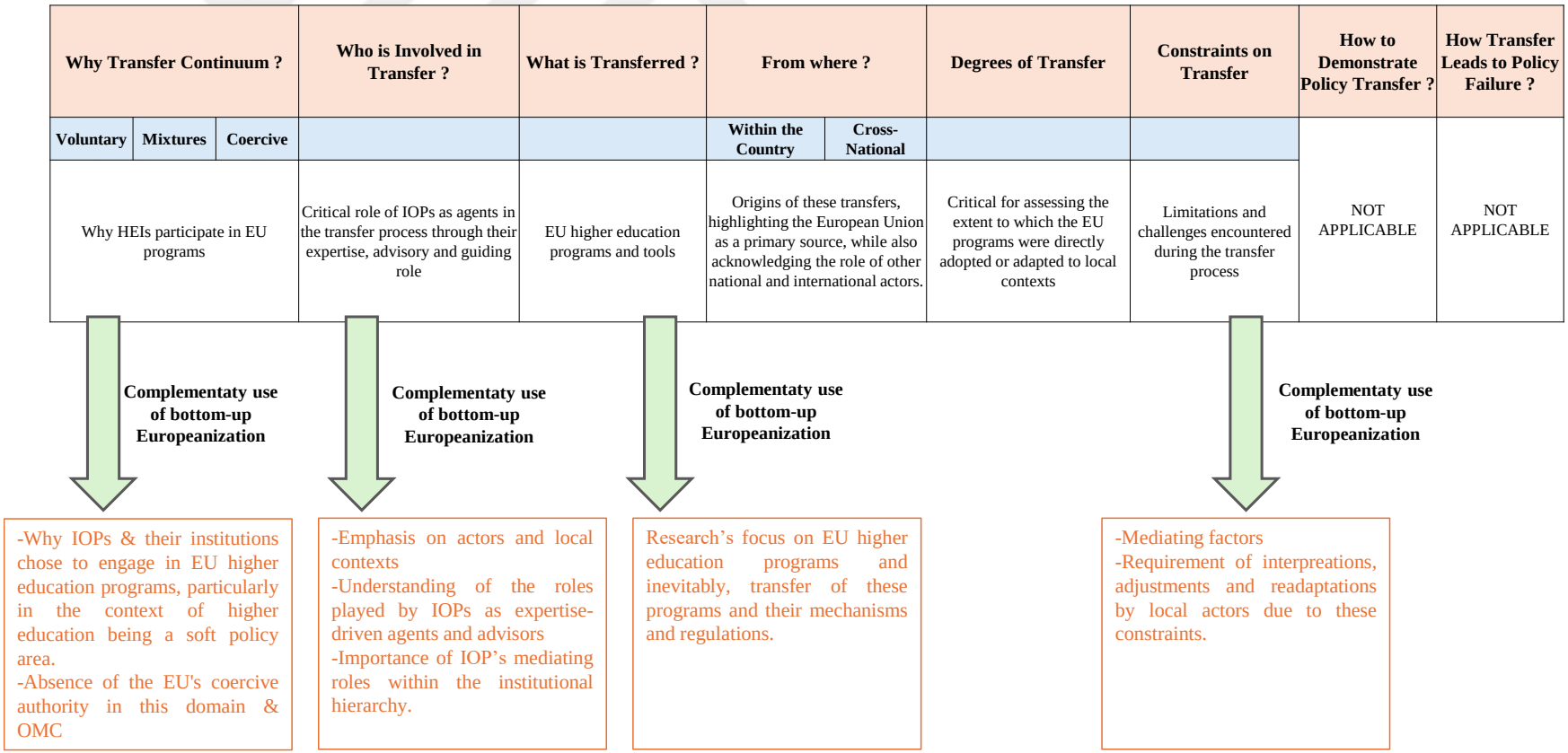


Figure 5.8 Complementary Use of Policy Transfer and Bottom-Up Europeanization Frameworks (*Not Processed*).

The primary reason for their exclusion is the study's focus on exploring the processes, perceptions, and roles IOPs in facilitating and mediating EU higher education programs, rather than evaluating the success or failure of specific policy transfers or attempting to systematically demonstrate instances of policy transfer. Moreover, these questions require longitudinal assessments or broader datasets beyond the scope of this study.

To supplement the policy transfer framework, bottom-up Europeanization is employed to better understand the role of actors, particularly the IOPs, in mediating and adapting policies within their institutional and national contexts. This additional theoretical lens is proposed to be essential in explaining the micro-level dynamics of policy transfer, such as the influence of the IOPs as the mediators between the institutional, national, and EU levels, as well as their role in overcoming local constraints and aligning the EU frameworks with the domestic needs. For instance, in the "Why transfer?" dimension, this theoretical approach is expected to help unpack the motivations of the IOPs as the agents actively involved in the transfer process. It offers a nuanced perspective on how voluntary participation is shaped by the nature of higher education as a soft policy area, where the European Union lacks coercive authority. The EU primarily employs mechanisms such as the Open Method of Coordination, which relies on persuasion, guidelines, benchmarks, indicators, and peer reviews, rather than coercive enforcement. In the "Who is involved in transfer?" dimension, bottom-up Europeanization is anticipated to be valuable as a theoretical lens that emphasizes actors and local contexts. It highlights the pivotal role of the IOPs as agents with expertise and advisory capacities. Despite not being ultimate decision-makers, these professionals actively influence the transfer process, showcasing the importance of their mediating roles within the institutional hierarchy. Similarly, in the "What is transferred?" section, this perspective is instrumental in understanding the specific EU higher education programs, mechanisms, and regulations being transferred. Given that the study focuses on the EU higher education policies, bottom-up Europeanization shed light on how these programs are perceived, adapted, and implemented at the institutional level. For the "Constraints on transfer" section, bottom-up Europeanization is particularly useful. It provides a toolkit for analyzing mediating factors such as veto points, degrees of statehood/institutional and administrative

capacity of states and so on that explain the challenges and barriers encountered during the transfer process. Moreover, it underscores how these constraints necessitate localized interpretations, adjustments, and adaptations, reinforcing the argument that this is not merely a top-down process but one that is actively interpreted and re-shaped by those at the bottom, including the IOPs and other institutional actors.

In summary, bottom-up Europeanization is intended to enrich the analysis by offering an actor-centered and context-sensitive approach in a way to complement the structured questions of the policy transfer framework, allowing for a deeper understanding of motivations, roles, constraints, and the dynamic processes of policy adaptation and implementation. The incorporation of bottom-up Europeanization is particularly significant in addressing "Who is Involved in Transfer?" and "Constraints on Transfer," where actor agency, institutional hierarchy, and local adaptations are the key factors.

5.11 Conclusion of the Chapter

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the research methods and data collection methodology employed in this study, focusing on the qualitative approach used to explore the perceptions and attitudes of International Office Professionals (IOPs) from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the People's Republic of China. It has detailed the process of participant selection, data collection through semi-structured interviews, analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and the steps taken to ensure validity and reliability, while also addressing potential limitations as well as theoretical positioning.

The following chapter will present a detailed analysis of the data gathered through these interviews. It will interpret the findings within the context of the research questions and theoretical frameworks offering insights into the experiences of IOPs with EU higher education programs and their transfer and implementation in varying institutional and national frameworks. This transition ensures a continuous progression from methodological discussion to data-driven analysis.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion chapter of this thesis aims to address the research questions by analyzing the results collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the representatives of the 13 higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, and Peoples' Republic of China. The interview questions are designed to explore how IOPs perceive, interpret, and implement the EU higher education policies and programs within their unique domestic and institutional contexts. Through this analysis, the study seeks to uncover the roles IOPs play in influencing higher-level decision-makers, the strategies they employ to navigate institutional and national challenges, and the extent to which their efforts shape the interpretation and implementation of the EU initiatives. By examining the interplay between institutional hierarchies, national settings, and the EU's role, this section provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of policy transfer and Europeanization in higher education.

Before presenting the analysis of the qualitative data, it is important to explain how the qualitative data from the interviews were made amenable to analysis by dividing them into themes and sub-themes with the purpose of generating a systematic analysis. The sub-themes derived from the interviews are grouped into four broad themes. This categorization ensures that the analysis remains methodical and closely adheres to the theoretical frameworks of the study. The theoretical foundations of Europeanization and policy transfer frameworks served as a conceptual lens through which the themes were categorized, allowing for the identification of their connections and significance to larger institutional and policy dynamics. This methodology facilitates a targeted examination that links empirical data to theoretical debates, offering a more profound comprehension of the transfer, adaptation, and implementation of the EU programs in various institutional and national contexts.

Table 6.1 outlines the sub-themes emerged from the qualitative data as grouped under four broad themes namely Institutional Perception and Positioning of IROs; Strategic Role and Influence of EU Programs in Institutional and National Policies; Pressures, Challenges and Decision-Making Dynamics in Policy Adaptation; Adaptation, Resistance and Support on Institutional and National Levels, encompassing sub-themes that address both institutional and national contexts. Themes such as *Institutional Perception and Positioning of IROs* and *Strategic Role and Influence of EU Programs in Institutional Policies* focus on the internal dynamics of higher education institutions. They investigate how international offices function within the organizational hierarchy, how EU programs are integrated into strategic planning, and the particular challenges and opportunities confronted at the institutional level. On the other hand, themes like *Strategic Role and Influence of EU Programs in National Policies* and *Pressures, Challenges and Decision-Making Dynamics in Policy Adaptation* extend the analysis to the national level, investigating the compliance of institutional practices with national strategies and the role of wider governing and policy frameworks. Finally, the theme *Adaptation, Resistance, and Support on Institutional and National Levels* interlinks the institutional and national levels since they address both institutional efforts and national priorities.

Based on the Table 6.1. the following parts of this chapter analyses the findings on the basis of the qualitative data from the interviews and elaborate how each theme relates to the theoretical framework. Before moving on to the analysis results, it is also necessary to state that the term "Erasmus," as generally expressed by the participants, actually refers to the contemporary Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) program, because this is the active program currently implemented in the non-EU countries. However, since the discussion also includes historical context, the umbrella term "Erasmus" is used to provide a comprehensive and unified reference for all sort of programs such as ICM, Tempus, EMJMD and so on.

Moreover, it is also important to note that frequency tables and visualizations from the MAXQDA accompany the majority of the sub-themes except a few of them. For example, such visualizations are not included in "Internationalization Background," where each institution provides unique data, and no frequency counts are available.

Table 6.1 Categorization of Themes.

1) Institutional Perception and Positioning of IROs
Sub-Themes
Self-perception of international relations office staff/ difference from other administrative units
Internationalization background of the institutions
Familiarity with the EU programs of institutions
Relations of the IROs with university administration/institutional authorities: institutional hierarchy and decision-making in EU higher education programs
Influence on upper-level decisions: university level
2) Strategic Role and Influence of EU Programs in Institutional and National Policies
Sub-Themes
Internationalization strategy and role of the EU programs in strategic planning
National internationalization strategy and role of the EU programs in national strategic planning
Influence on upper-level decisions: national level
3) Pressures, Challenges and Decision-Making Dynamics in Policy Adaptation
Sub-Themes
Pressure from university administration on the IROs
Pressure from national authorities
Legal and institutional difficulties
4) Adaptation, Resistance and Support on Institutional and National Levels
Sub-Themes
Motivations for participation in the EU higher education programs
Changes and policy adaptation
Resistance or support from other actors within the institution for the EU programs and changes applied due to the EU programs
Relations with other international offices in the same country

The answers to the question about "Influence on Upper-Level Decisions," where participants discussed effects at the institutional and national levels together, provide

yet another illustration. Consequently, this question's visualizations are shown under "Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level," which includes tables and MAXQDA visuals for both levels. Similarly, for responses to questions on "National Strategy," which often contain country-specific information, creating frequency tables is not meaningful. Therefore, while frequency tables were not provided for a few sub-themes, they were included for all others.

6.1 Institutional Perception and Positioning of International Relations Offices

With an emphasis on an institutional-level analysis, this theme will look at how International Office Professionals (IOPs) view and define their roles, interact with institutional governance frameworks, and impact decision-making processes. It will also look at the historical development of internationalization initiatives within the institutions and the degree of institutional familiarity with and execution of EU programs.

Considering that bottom-up Europeanization perspective starts with the actors, problems, discourses, and interactions at the domestic level, unlike the top-down approach, it will also be effective in explanatory power in this theme, as one of the theoretical frameworks of the thesis. Accordingly, this theme will explore how the International Relations Offices (IROs) perceive their own roles and capacities through their perspectives from the bottom and how these offices distinguish their activities from the other administrative units in their higher education institutions. Also, through the "internationalization background" sub-theme, the framework of bottom-up Europeanization allows for an analysis of whether internationalization efforts are domestically driven or influenced by external factors, such as EU programs, thereby tracing the roots of policy transfer (tracing causality). Moreover, from the perspective of policy transfer, the familiarity with EU programs highlights what knowledge or policy elements are transferred and how these elements are perceived and legitimized by the IROs. In addition, the sub-theme of "relations with university administration/institutional authorities" asked to understand the role of the IROs and

university administration in decisions regarding mobility processes, is closely linked to the question of "who is involved in the transfer process" within the framework of policy transfer. This theme will also seek to understand the extent to which international offices can influence institutional-level decision-making processes regarding the EU programs and internationalization in general.

6.1.1 Self-Perception of International Relations Offices Staff/ Difference from Other Administrative Units

IOPs are responsible for implementing policies from international organizations, governments, and university administration. They are senior, innovative, and unique professionals, adapting to the ever-developing practices of international education, specific needs, and global trends.

However, in order to understand whether they themselves confirm this image seen from the outside and how they define themselves, these key informants were asked the following question during the interviews; *"How do you think you differ from other administrative units of the university, with regards to the duties and responsibilities? [for example, from the Student Affairs Office?] Can you give some examples?"* Through this way, the interviewed IOPs were also requested to provide their self-perceptions on how their international offices distinguish themselves from other administrative units within the organization.

The analysis reveals that the most frequently mentioned factor is language proficiency. This sub-theme, which draws attention to the language proficiency (especially English) of international office employees, unlike other administrative units, was expressed by five out of total 13 institutions. In line with this result, it might be noted that the sub-theme of foreign language proficiency as the most frequently mentioned response also aligns with the portrayal of the International Office Professionals (IOPs) as highly skilled, multilingual, and qualitied personnel.

The second most frequently mentioned sub-theme highlights that, while other administrative units primarily engage with institutional and local actors, the

international offices extend their interactions to include external stakeholders. Additionally, the supportive role of international offices emerges as an equally prevalent sub-theme. According to participants' responses, this supportive role involves responsibilities such as providing guidance on existing practices and policies (e.g., travel procedures) and fostering engagement among local actors with respect to international programs.

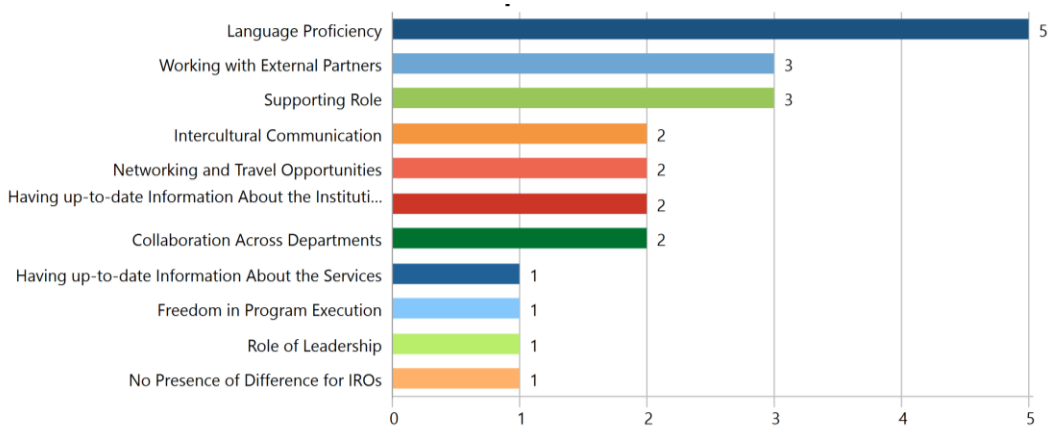


Figure 6.1 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Self Perception of IRO Staff.

Furthermore, “intercultural communication, networking and travel opportunities, having up-to-date information about the institution and collaboration across other units of institution” are among the sub-themes expressed more than once in response to the question of how international offices differ from other administrative units.

The patterns observed in the overall analysis of the responses are similarly reflected in the country-specific analyses. When we examine the responses on a country-by-country basis and firstly look at the Republic of Kazakhstan, interviewed International Offices usually explain their differences from other units as knowing a foreign language/English and working with external stakeholders. In this context, there is also a reference to the fact that Russian is spoken in Kazakhstan. One of the participants expressed this situation: *“(…) You should know English. Not all staff knows English because in Kazakhstan there are two main languages: Kazakh and Russian (Institution K2)”.* These responses (about language proficiency) from participants in Kazakhstan reflect the country’s efforts to transition from Soviet influence towards a market-

driven education system, marked by sociocultural changes such as shifting the language of education from Russian to Kazakh, as well as the challenges of low English proficiency among academic staff and students in Kazakh higher education institutions, as also stated by Bednyakova (2014) and Jumakulov & Ashirbekov (2016). There are also interviewees who stated that they differed from other units in areas such as explaining cultural differences to incoming participants, providing 7/24 service, and traveling.

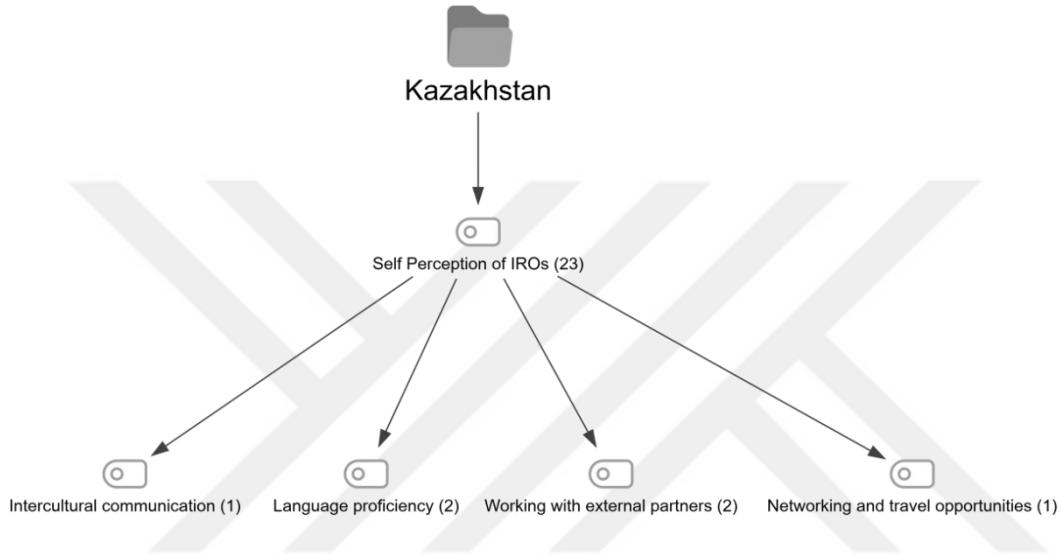


Figure 6.2 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Self Perception of IROs (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

On the other hand, there is no common explanation of the differences between the international offices and other units in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among the unique answers given are knowing a foreign language/English, traveling, having up-to-date information about the university, knowing all the staff at the university, working with external stakeholders. For example, an interviewee in Bosnia and Herzegovina defines IOPs and their differences from other administrative units as follows.

> I think our work is 80% of administration and sitting in front of the computer, Excel tables and all those software and everything. And I think every office is like that, adding to us that we do in different languages, in English, most cases. 20% is being prepared and knowing you have to know everything about the university. You have to know everything about the other offices, about other administration. You have a lot of opportunities to network. And meet new people and participate and travel visit to different universities, which is not that much offered to other institutions (Institution B1).

Moreover, one of the noteworthy responses from Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasizes the freedom in program execution and having up-to-date information about the institution (staff working at the institution) and services and the relevant quotation is presented below.

> Erasmus, Mevlana, Fulbright all those programs give you freedom to actually do it the way they need to be done. Everybody likes international relations office, because it provides them with the service, they would not be able to do themselves. I am probably the only person at the university who knows every professor and teaching assistant by name (Institution B2).

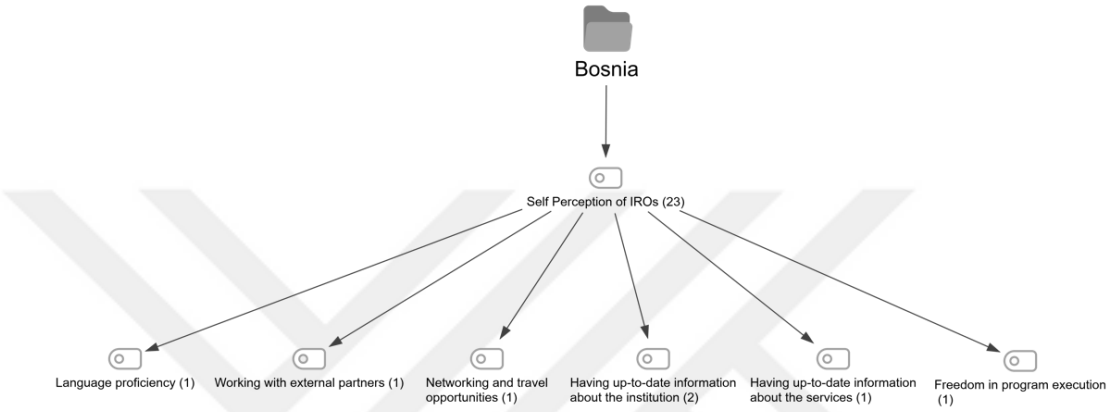


Figure 6.3 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Self Perception of IROs (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is no common explanation of the differences between international offices in People's Republic of China and other units, but it is still seen that knowing a foreign language/English is mentioned by at least two participants. One of the participants expressed this situation as follows: *"Chinese are not that good at speaking English. I think the most difference is for the English translation (Institution C4)".* Apart from that, cooperation with other units, intercultural communication, being open, being able to provide guidance on the most up-to-date travel arrangements and foreign policies are among the unique answers given. As a prominent example, one of the participants thinks that international offices are no different from other administrative units and states that internationalization is not limited to international offices:

> (…) From my point of view, that we have no difference because we're, I mean, eventually we all walk for the benefits of our students, right? This is our terminal goal, however. I mean, but we still need to acknowledge that we need help. By no means international work or internationalization is only confined to international affairs office (Institution C6).

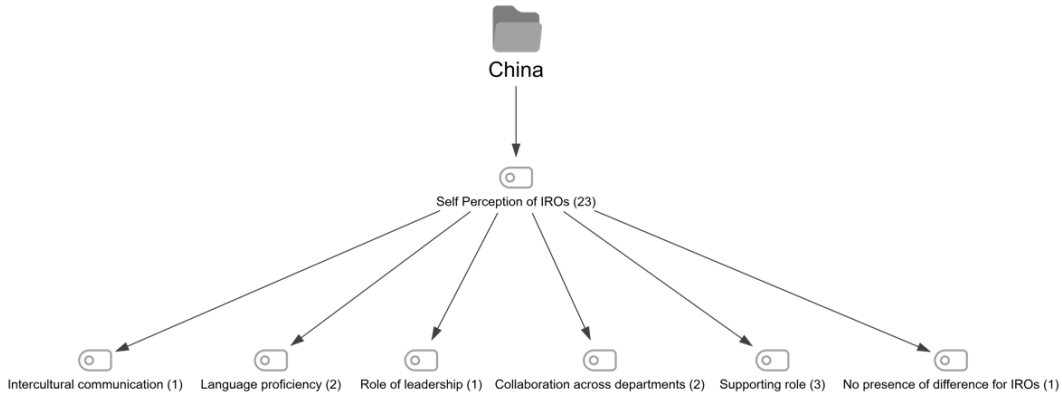


Figure 6.4 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Self Perception of IROs (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

To conclude, the participants' opinions about how international offices set themselves apart from other administrative divisions mostly revolve around three main sub-themes: their ability to communicate in foreign languages, their interaction with external stakeholders and their supportive function within the organization. These are further contextualized by country-specific responses. The two most frequently mentioned differences in Kazakhstan are fluency in foreign languages and interaction with external parties, with special contributions such as explaining cultural differences, providing 7/24 assistance, and travel opportunities. These answers support Kazakhstan's attempts to shed its Soviet past and make a name for itself in the international educational scene.

While responses differ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, working with external actors, extensive familiarity with university personnel and structures, and knowing English are noteworthy themes. While proficiency in foreign languages is still important in China, other topics like intercultural communication and offering current policy guidance are also mentioned. These results emphasize the unique and varied functions of international offices in various national contexts, underscoring their vital roles in the larger internationalization and institutional development processes. Table 6.2. summarizes the findings related to the sub-theme of "self-perception of IROs."

Table 6.2 Self-Perception of IROs (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Language proficiency	-Requirement of having English proficiency -Emphasis on Kazakh and Russian language	Requirement of having English proficiency	Requirement of having English proficiency
Working with external partners	External parties	Working with foreign institutions	Not applicable
Supporting role	Not applicable	Not applicable	Guidance for relevant policies, guidance for regulations and travel policies
Inter-cultural communication	Cultural differences	Not applicable	Intercultural, misunderstanding, communication, open, friendly, communication
Networking and travel opportunities	"If needed you fly to another country"	Opportunities to do network, meet new people and travel and visit to different universities	Not applicable
Having up-to-date information about the institution	Not applicable	Knowing everything about the university Knowing all university staff	Not applicable
Institution-specific issues	7/24 service	Freedom in program execution Having up-to-date information about the services	Role of leadership Collaborate across departments. No presence of difference

6.1.2 Internationalization Background of the Institutions

To comprehend the internationalization histories of the institutions, the informants were asked: *"How long has your institution been engaged in international higher education initiatives? When and how was your office established? What kind of turning points has your International Office experienced concerning internationalization activities?"* These questions aim to explore whether the internationalization practices of the institutions align with the political and economic developments at both national and global levels. Additionally, they seek to determine, within the framework of Europeanization and the tracing causality approach (Exadaktylos & Radaelli, 2009; Haverland, 2005) whether the critical turning points in the internationalization trajectory were driven predominantly by the EU programs or influenced by other external factors.

An examination of the internationalization histories of higher education institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, based on participants' responses, reveals that the earliest international activity occurred in an institution (among the interviewed ones) that signed its first bilateral cooperation agreement in 1998 and facilitated its initial student mobility in 2001. However, the international office of this institution was established 13 years after the university's foundation. In contrast, the establishment of international offices in other Kazakh institutions was reported to have taken place in 2009, 2011, and 2013, respectively, with internationalization activities commencing from these dates onwards.

Consequently, it might be noted that establishment of international offices in Kazakhstan predominantly occurred during the latter half of the 2000s. This development may be interpreted as a parallel progression with the diminishing influence of the Soviet Union, as highlighted by one of the participants*; "(…) I think it's also related to the fact that before Kazakhstan was a part USSR, so, you know, it was close, so there weren't any international relations, etc. Oh, yeah, well, for our office, it was in 2013 when office starts, like doing Erasmus program" (Institution K2)*. Kazakhstan has undergone a thorough reform process since gaining independence in order to move away from the Soviet legacy and establish a liberal democracy and

market-driven competitive economy. In that regard, higher education and EU-country relations played a significant role in this shift, which was not just economic but also sociocultural (Ahn et.al., 2018), as supported by the interviewee's statement.

On the other hand, based on the participants' responses, the internationalization history of institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals that the earliest international activity dates back to 1965, when an institution signed an agreement with a German university. However, the establishment of an international office occurred much later, in 1995–1996, following the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This institution joined the Erasmus Program through a specialized sub-program-Erasmus Mundus in 2007 and became fully integrated into the program in 2014. The participant from this institution highlighted the expectation that Bosnia's attainment of EU candidate country status would mark a significant milestone in its internationalization efforts, potentially requiring either the establishment of a dedicated Erasmus office or an expansion of the existing international office's staff:

> (…) Another turning point will probably happen is that we gain the status of memberships for EU which will also ask from us try to transit from partner country to program country. We will need to either establish separate Erasmus office or to increase the number of people working here (Institution B1).

Among the other two institutions, one reported that their international office was established before 2008, while the other indicated that their faculty's involvement in the Tempus Program in the early 2000s and the adoption of the Bologna Process in 2008 led to the establishment of their international office.

Consequently, it is understood that international offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina were generally established or included in Erasmus programs since the second half of the 2000s. This might be considered as a situation that developed in parallel with the developments such as the end of the war and the independence of the country. In this context, it can be argued that the developments in internationalization practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina align with broader historical and political milestones. In other words, establishment of the system of government in 1995, following the Yugoslavian War (1992–1995) through the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, serves as a foundational context for these developments (Zgaga et al.,

2013). Moreover, the country's evolving relationship with the EU and the associated developments appear to be closely linked to higher education as a whole, as well as to the responsibilities, organizational structures, and functions of international offices. As a country designated as a prospective candidate for EU membership in 2003 and officially granted candidate status in 2022, the EU membership perspective and its associated requirements play a crucial role in understanding Bosnia and Herzegovina's internationalization of higher education trajectory and the integration of the country into the Bologna process as also expressed by the participants.

Furthermore, one of the participants highlighted that the establishment of a dedicated Erasmus office would be necessary if Bosnia and Herzegovina transitions to a program country status, while another noted that the creation of an international office was initiated following the adoption of the Bologna Declaration. These developments represent key transformative moments influenced by the EU programs, aligning with the Europeanization theory and the tracing causality approach.

Regarding the People's Republic of China, it is understood that there is no similar and common response from the participants regarding the establishment of international offices and institutional history of internationalization. One participant indicated that their institution had been engaged in internationalization efforts since its establishment in 1907 due to its affiliation with German tradition, while another reported that the flow of international students began shortly after the institution's foundation in 1949. A third institution similarly traced its internationalization activities back to the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, due to its historical legacy as an ancient and traditional dynasty, responses from China indicate earlier initiation of internationalization efforts compared to other countries. However, it is evident that in all these cases, more formalized institutional internationalization processes and the establishment of dedicated international offices predominantly emerged during the 2000s. Notably, four out of six interviewees from China reported that their international offices were established after 2000. Among the remaining two institutions, distinctive responses were provided: as illustrated above, one noted that its international office was originally established in 1980, coinciding with China's opening-up reforms, although its name and functions were redefined after 2000.

> (…) Our office was established in 1980, actually right after China's reform and opening up 1980. At that time, our office mainly deals with all kinds of passport and visa services for faculty going abroad and also to taking care of the daily work of foreign faculty were coming to teach. In 2005, it was renamed into the office of international cooperation exchange. And also at that time, the economic globalization. The world needs have talents who are equipped with kind of cross-cultural competence and international visions. So, our offices, functions and focus have been shifted. After the reform and opening up of the whole China all the institutions they are moving forward in terms of the international collaboration (Institution C5).

The other interviewee emphasized how its international unit, established in 1995, was first charged with overseeing World Bank and UNDP projects before taking on more extensive internationalization duties.

While student mobility in China was initiated in earlier periods, the establishment of institutional international offices after 2000, as well as the redefinition of the roles, responsibilities, and even the names of pre-existing international offices during this period, aligns with China's opening-up policy. This shift, particularly after 2010, corresponds to initiatives such as the establishment of the "Study in China" program, the implementation of international development aid strategies, the establishment of Confucius Institutes, and the transition from an inward-focused approach (sending students abroad) to an outward-oriented strategy aimed at attracting international students (Wu, 2017). The implementation of China's outward-facing strategy, initiated in 2010 and characterized by a dual focus on not only sending students abroad but also attracting international students, is voiced by an interviewee as follows:

> You know, in the old days, there were not many international students to come to China, right? Then it changed, more international students started to come to China. So, the old international office was just separated into two parts. One is the old international office. One is School of International Education. They used to be one, and then on the year 2013, it changed into different departments (Institution C4).

To conclude, while the establishment and development of international offices across three countries show different paths influenced by historical, political, and cultural factors, internationalization seems to be institutionalized primarily in the 2000s in each of the three countries. International offices in Kazakhstan mostly emerged in the second half of the 2000s, as the country moved away from Soviet influence and underwent more extensive reforms to become part of international educational frameworks. Similar to this, Bosnia and Herzegovina's international activities began

in the 1960s, but after the war and the country's independence in 1995, international offices were established and integration into EU programs like Erasmus accelerated.

Table 6.3 Internationalization Background of the Institutions (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
First internationalization attempts	End of 1990s (after the dissolution of USSR) and beginning of 2000s	The earliest international activity dates back to 1965	The earliest international activity dates back to the first half of the 1900s, due to its historical legacy as an ancient and traditional dynasty
Institutionalization of internationalization (establishment of IROs)	Second half of the 2000s	After the end of war (1995) and especially second half of the 2000s	Internationalization efforts were more institutionalized after 1980s and international offices were mainly established after 2000s
Impact of country background & the EU on internationalization of higher education	-Parallel progression with the diminishing influence of the Soviet Union -Limited influence of EU on the first internationalization attempts	-Following the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) -Big influence of EU: Participation in Erasmus programs after the second half of 2000s and prospective candidate for EU membership since 2003 and official candidate since 2022	- Impact of opening-up policy of China in 1980s -Impact of outward oriented strategy of China that began after 2010 through its efforts like Study in China, Confucius Institutes etc. -No influence of EU on the first and later internationalization attempts

Given the increasing importance of the EU initiatives in institutional strategies, this development shows Bosnia and Herzegovina's alignment with Europeanization processes. Even though China has a longer history of internationalization, formalized

international offices and repurposed roles became more noticeable after 2000. This coincided with the country's opening-up policies and a deliberate outward shift in higher education through initiatives. Table 6.3 summarizes the findings related to the sub-theme of "internationalization background of the institutions."

6.1.3 Familiarity of Institutions with the EU Programs

In order to assess the extent to which international office staff are familiar with the EU programs and the role these programs play in shaping office responsibilities, the interviewees were asked the following questions: *"What are the main responsibilities and duties carried out by your International Office? How do they play a role in your office's international activities?"* This sub-theme is directly linked to the "what is transferred" component of the policy transfer framework developed by Dolowitz and Marsh. Furthermore, from the perspective of policy transfer, familiarity with the EU programs sheds light on what knowledge or policy elements are transferred and how these elements are perceived by international office professionals.

An analysis of the responses provided by International Office Professionals from the Republic of Kazakhstan reveals varying perspectives regarding the role and significance of the EU higher education programs in their office operations. While three out of four participants stated that the EU programs had a limited impact on their workload, one participant highlighted the substantial importance of the Erasmus program in their office activities, as demonstrated in the following statement:

> (…) Erasmus programs are one of the biggest parts of the office workload. For example, many students who received Erasmus. They come to our university, for example, this year, this semester, we're waiting for 45 students, and 30 of them from Europe, and half of them, or more than half of them, received this Erasmus program (Institution K1).

On the other hand, remaining participants stated that the program had a limited impact on office work due to reasons such as limited grant quotas, students having to cover their own expenses, and the difficulty of finding partners from Europe. As an example, the following quotation reflects the perspective of a participant who highlighted the program's limited impact on office work, attributing it to the restricted grant quotas.

> Probably it's [Erasmus] not the big part of the office, we are not having a lot of places for the Erasmus funding for the mobility programs and does not take a lot of part of our job. But if we say if we are winning the projects, as I already mentioned, for example, in the data science. It took us a lot, you know, like job. But it's a seasonal job. If we have the project, we do that. In the last two years, we are not winning the projects. So, although we have applied for the last call five projects, we didn't win any of them. 100 students per year for the mobility, and just two of them from Erasmus. The government gives us for example, 20 students for funding. But most of our students do by their own funding (Institution K3).

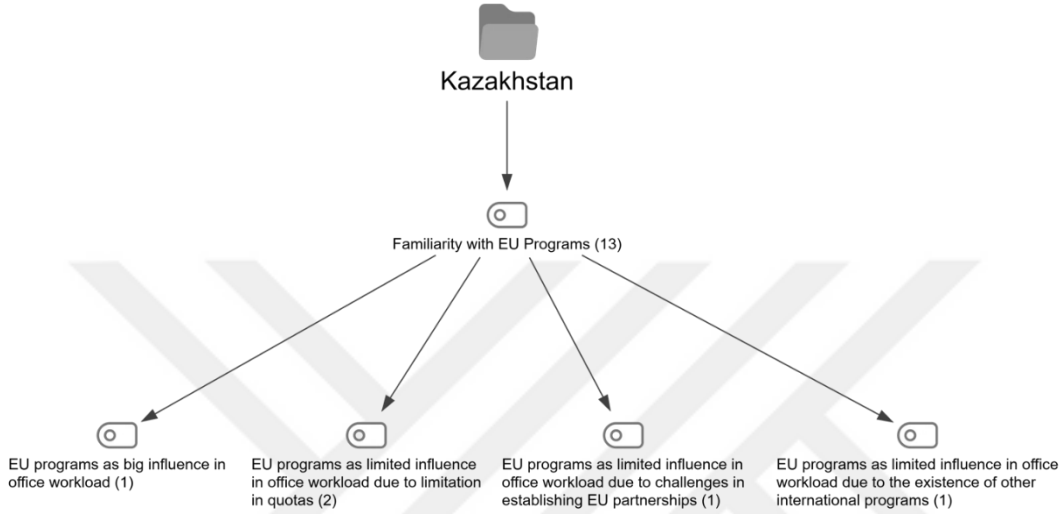


Figure 6.5 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Familiarity with the EU Programs of Institutions (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

However, while the majority of participants indicated that EU programs constitute only a portion of their office responsibilities and are not among their primary duties, all participants in Kazakhstan demonstrated a strong familiarity with EU programs, particularly Erasmus.

Similarly, an analysis of responses from Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals that, despite variations in the level of participation and the prominence of EU higher education programs within the responsibilities of international offices, all respondents exhibited extensive knowledge of these programs, particularly about the Erasmus. Moreover, the Erasmus Program is actively implemented across all the interviewed institutions and is considered one of the core responsibilities of the international offices in the majority of cases.

In this context, two participants emphasized that EU programs constitute a significant portion of their office workload. One respondent noted, *"We are focusing on short-term mobilities, especially those facilitated by programs like Erasmus. (…) 70% of funds come from EU-funded programs, and most of them are from Erasmus (Institution B1)."* Similarly, another participant described their office workload as, *"I will say probably 60% Erasmus, 40% everything else (Institution B2)."* Conversely, one of the three participants highlighted that while EU programs have a relatively limited influence on their office workload, they remain significant, stating, *"EU programs are just part of international activities. EU programs are not the only and exclusive programs for our university, but they are an important part (Institution B3)."*

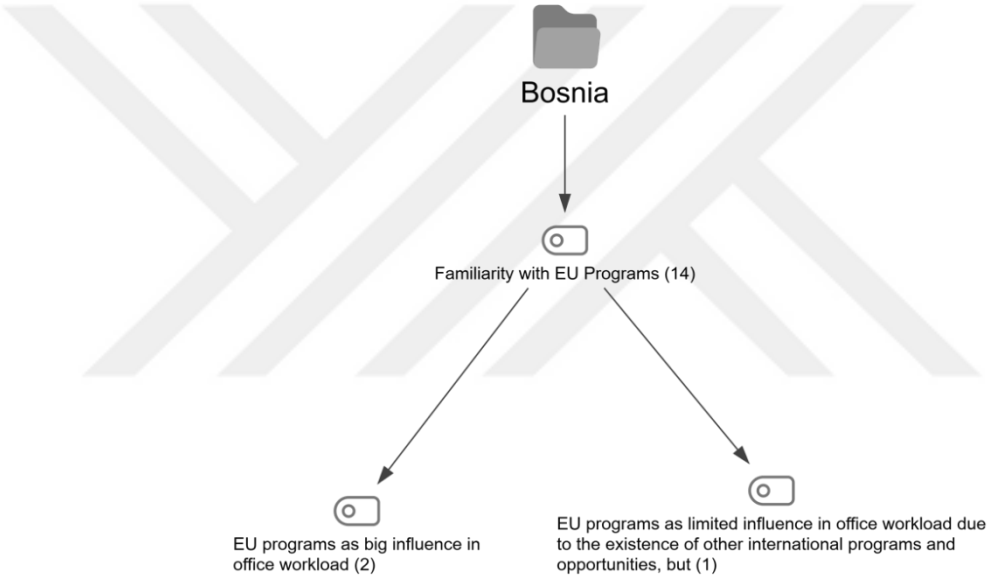


Figure 6.6 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Familiarity with the EU Programs of Institutions (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Contrary to other two countries, an analysis of international offices in the People's Republic of China regarding their familiarity with EU higher education programs and the role these programs play in their operations reveals that only one of the interviewed institutions actively manages an Erasmus mobility program, who indicated that it is still a small part of their office activities. While some institutions have implemented Erasmus projects (not mobility programs) currently or mobility programs in previous

years, the overall picture indicates that EU higher education programs, particularly Erasmus, do not constitute core responsibilities for any of the international offices. As illustrated in the figure below, all Chinese respondents reported that EU programs exerted only a limited influence on their office activities. So, it is evident that Chinese international relations offices demonstrate limited familiarity with the Erasmus program.

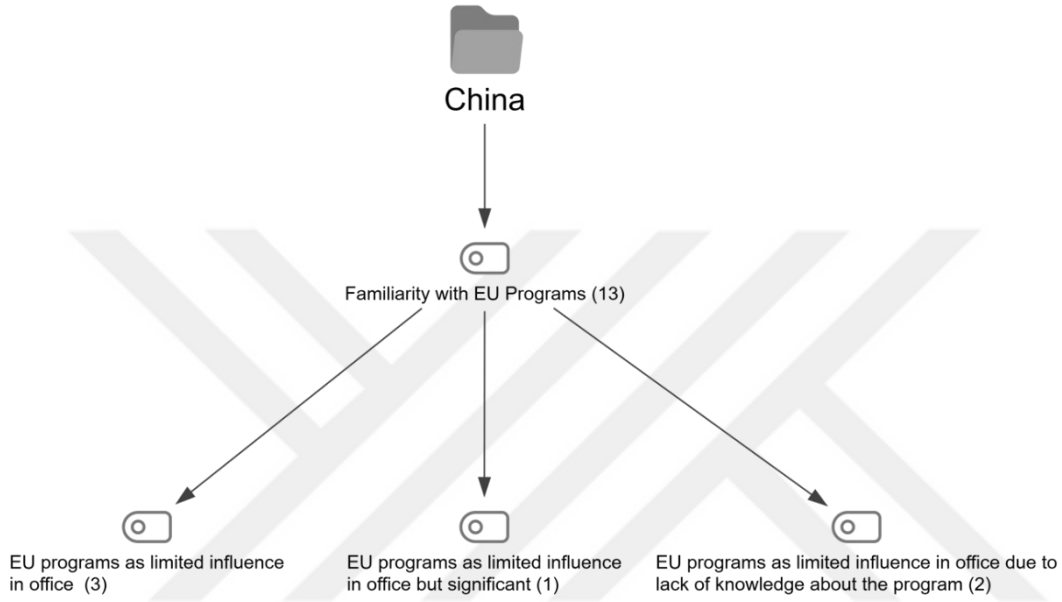


Figure 6.7 Frequency of Sub-Themes for the Theme of Familiarity with the EU Programs of Institutions (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

Moreover, a notable factor contributing to the limited impact of EU programs on office operations appears as a lack of understanding regarding the program's mechanisms and functioning:

> We used to have [Erasmus] but we are not familiar with how it works so it is just suspended. We do not deal with the Erasmus; we are counting on our own government (Institution C4).

> We did join the EU program before, probably around 10 years ago, for several years. But unfortunately, we haven't been part of EU programs anymore. Before EU programs, we had China Window program about 10 years ago and also there is one called Erasmus Asia. We want to join but we don't know how to join it again (Institution C5).

To conclude, different levels of familiarity and operational significance are highlighted by the analysis, which shows a range of engagement with the EU higher education

programs across three countries. Although EU programs are not usually at the center of office activities in Kazakhstan except one institution, participants show a keen awareness of them, especially Erasmus, despite limitations like limited grants, student costs, and difficulties establishing partnerships. On the other hand, Erasmus programs become a primary duty for the majority of foreign offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, demonstrating a greater level of integration into the EU initiatives and a mutual recognition of their significance. However, the role of EU programs in China is noticeably minor; there has been little operational influence and little familiarity with them. This divergence highlights the ways in which institutional, geopolitical, and economic factors influence how EU programs are integrated and perceived. The results pertaining to the sub-theme of "familiarity with the EU programs of institutions" are shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Familiarity with the EU Programs of Institutions (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Awareness	High	High	Quite Limited
Participation	Limited	High	Quite Limited
Operational impact	Limited	High	Quite Limited
Role of the EU programs in office workload	Limited	High	Quite Limited
Role of the EU programs in internationalization	not the main elements of internationalization	main elements of internationalization	not the main elements of internationalization

6.1.4 Relations of the IROs with University Administration and Institutional Authorities: Institutional Hierarchy and Decision-Making in EU Higher Education Programs

Aligned with the policy transfer framework, which seeks to address who is involved in transfer and who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process, the following question was asked to understand which actors influence decision-making

processes related to EU programs and how international offices contribute to these decision-making processes from bottom level: *"How would you describe your office's relationship with the University administration with regards to the decisions and implementations of internationalization and the EU higher education programs?"*

Once the results are analyzed in general, first of all, it is observed that, similar to other administrative units, all international offices operate under the authority of the university administration, specifically reporting to Vice-Presidents/Vice-Rectors or directly to the Presidents/Rectors. In this context, Vice-Presidents/Vice-Rectors or Presidents/Rectors are identified as being responsible for the management of international offices. The Table 6.5 illustrates which administrative figures oversee the institutions and international offices based on participants' responses. It is important to highlight that Vice-Presidents/Vice-Rectors and Presidents/Rectors play a crucial role in shaping and overseeing international policies. Additionally, the terminology used to denote these roles may vary across institutions, with "Vice-President" and "Vice-Rector" as well as "President" and "Rector" referring to the same managerial positions depending on the institutional context. The Table 6.5. is prepared based on the specific terminology employed within each institution and the responses provided by interviewees.

Based on the responses from participants in the Republic of Kazakhstan, there were varying perspectives regarding whether the decision-making processes in institutions concerning EU programs and internationalization efforts, in general, are centralized or decentralized. At Institution K1, a highly centralized structure was described, where all mobility policies, financial directives, and inter-institutional agreements require approval and oversight from top management. In contrast, Institution K2 depicted a more decentralized approach, with each school operating autonomously, managing its own budget, and relying on a commission to approve partnership decisions; *"(…) So, every department, every school, are autonomous, yeah. So, every department has their own budget, and they do plan for year by their own (…) We have a commission. In this commission there are approximately 9 or 10 people from different schools, and from our department."*

Table 6.5 Administration Members Responsible for International Offices.

Republic of Kazakhstan Institution 1	Vice President
Republic of Kazakhstan Institution 2	President
Republic of Kazakhstan Institution 3	Vice-Rectors
Republic of Kazakhstan Institution 4	Rector
Bosnia and Herzegovina Institution 1	Vice-Rector
Bosnia and Herzegovina Institution 2	Vice-Rector
Bosnia and Herzegovina Institution 3	Vice-Rector
People's Republic of China Institution 1	Vice-President
People's Republic of China Institution 2	Not applicable
People's Republic of China Institution 3	President
People's Republic of China Institution 4	Vice-Rector
People's Republic of China Institution 5	Vice-President
People's Republic of China Institution 6	Vice-President

Similarly, Institution K3 emphasized the role of the Vice Rector and a committee in overseeing mobility programs, with final decisions being committee driven and highlighted the initiator and developer role of international offices as exemplified with the quotation below:

> (…) In most of the universities that I have contacted, in Europe, universities, the international office, they just act as the ones who do the tasks, but participating in the project comes from the faculty itself. But here in Kazakhstan, I will say it's different, because we are the ones who have to initiate that, and then ask, please, someone can participate on that, or, like, find the right person who can. But generally, it doesn't have to be, I believe, the international office, the interest has to come from the faculty. But in our case, it's different. And therefore, probably, I would say, we have to be the ones who will ask all departments to come, to engage, to participate. (…) For choosing the person who will go through the funding for any kind of exchange programs, we based on some rules, right, and then this is the internal university rules, the written rules, and the written rules is actually developed by me by the international office, and then it is presented in for the committee, and we discuss all together. So therefore, I act as the developer, but the decision is made by the Council. (Institution K3).

Meanwhile, at the Institution K4 challenges were noted in obtaining departmental support for the EU program collaborations due to time constraints. However, the

Rector and Vice Rector were characterized as open and flexible, provided that proposals were well-articulated and justified.

Although institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan portray varying hierarchical structures within the centralized and decentralized dichotomy, a commonality among the majority of participant responses is the emphasis on the expertise, advisory role, and reliance on the proficiency of international offices. The interviewee from the Institution K1 highlighted that top management *"always waits for the advice from the international office,"* while that from the Institution K2 emphasized the presence of the office coordinator in all commission meetings. Similarly, the interviewee from the Institution K3 underscored the pivotal role of international offices, stating, *"They actually believe that we are the main point who is responsible for that, who knows better, who knows all other points. Because not like everyone knows how all the exchange programs are regulated, how the procedures are going on. And therefore, they find that we are the experts' opinion for all those points."*

Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, decentralized vs. centralized decision-making varies among institutions; some emphasize a collaborative, decentralized approach where international offices are directly involved in implementing initiatives, especially for EU-aligned strategies such as ECTS, while others adhere strictly to statutes and rulebooks for regulatory compliance. The interviewee from the Institution B1 portrayed a more decentralized decision-making process and smooth relationship with the leadership as exemplified in the quotation below:

> When it comes to relationship with the university administration, we have a very good cooperation because we do a lot of work and we provide a lot of support to the management (…) In most cases, it all comes through us. When is an initiative is introduced, we are the number ones who will deal with the promotion of it and establishment and how it will be incorporated. For instance, when the Bologna Process and ECTS happened, it was our office to introduce all these academic coordinators how to accept and recognize the ECTS and how. So, I think it is very important to have international office to work, when EU administrative strategies come to help, to promote. (Institution B1)

On the other hand, Institution B3 was reported to strictly adhere to statutes and rulebooks for regulatory compliance. Differently, for the Institution B2, while describing a more centralized decision-making mechanism where partnership

proposals must be approved by top management, the interviewee simultaneously emphasized the role of faculty coordinators. Additionally, she highlighted that all vice rectors value her opinions, portraying the vice rector as their voice within the management structure. The participant further noted the importance of finding a way to maintain a good working relationship with the vice rector to ensure effective collaboration and representation at the administrative level.

> The thing is that if I want my office to run smoothly, I have to be in a good relationship with my vice rector, because he's my connection to director and to the management. So, I don't understand those international relations officers who say, oh well, I disagree with my Vice rector. Why? You have to find a common ground to work with him or her? Because you depend on that person, because that person is your voice at the management level, that person is representing you at the management sessions. So, you really need to work well with your vice rector. You don't agree with everything he she does, but you have to have common ground, common goal, and what do you want to achieve? Because his goal becomes my goal. You're going to be arguing with your vice rector about every issue, of course, he doesn't know Erasmus Plus guide, guidebook, because he didn't even know existed before he came as a vice rector. So, you need to give him time. He's your voice in management meeting. So, you really need him to be by your side (Institution B2).

Just like Republic of Kazakhstan, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the advisory role of international offices and the reliance on their expertise are also prominent. The participant from the Institution B1 emphasized that while university management members frequently change, international offices remain constant, necessitating trust in their expertise; *"Vice Rector for internationalization can do a lot of work, but they are changing always, so they depend on International Relations Office. So, we have to know all the changes, all the strategies, everything that is happening or changing or something it."* Similarly, the participant from the Institution B2 highlighted that, as an expert recognized for comprehensive knowledge of Erasmus, her opinions are generally valued and consistently accepted by the University administration; *"I have my own comments, and all of my comments are always accepted, because I'm that person who knows Erasmus and everybody, everything else (…) All the vice rectors care about my opinion."*

Likewise, an analysis of the responses from participants in People's Republic of China reveals differing perspectives on centralized and decentralized decision-making approaches, with some institutions exhibiting a combination of both. The participant from Institution C1 noted that university management made decisions based on risk

analysis, depending on the specific topic, while also emphasizing the autonomy of the international office and the necessity of administrative support.

> (…) It depends on what kind of thing it is. We have the autonomy. And we build programs, we build projects. We manage that kind of projects and the programs. Then the upper level, they decide whether we are going to do this or not. If these kinds of programs, this kind of projects, they have risks, risks of ideology. We won't to that. But if not, everything is good to China and good to other countries, we do that. And if it's good to our students and good to our teachers, we do that. So, I call that kind of autonomy, right? (…) They must support us. So not everything you mentioned, or you apply is okay, but so you have to try, and it must be reasonable. And if they denied your proposal, they have to give you reasons (Institution C1).

The interviewee from the Institution C2 described a smooth relationship with management, while that from the Institution C3 highlighted a much more decentralized and autonomous atmosphere due to its German tradition and influence, particularly in academic matters, where there was significant freedom.

The participant also mentioned that while the rector assigned some tasks, these were rarely related to international collaborations. The key respondent from the Institution C4 indicated that decisions regarding internationalization processes were made collaboratively between the administration and the international office. Meanwhile, the participant from the Institution C5 emphasized that management officials relied on the vice rector for decisions, but the international office's suggestions and ideas significantly influenced the process; *"our suggestions and ideas are very important for decision-making, because we are the ones who know better about the situation" (Institution C5)*. Lastly, the participant from the Institution C6 stated that approximately four years ago, he personally developed the institution's internationalization strategy, demonstrating the office's role as a primary initiator, although final approval rested with top management.

To conclude; international offices seem organizationally under the authority of a vice rector or directly the rector in all institutions, who hold the highest positions when it comes to making decisions about the EU programs and internationalization initiatives. The degree to which these decision-making structures are centralized or decentralized, however, varies greatly between countries and even among institutions within the same country. For instance, while one institution in Republic of Kazakhstan explained

a highly centralized system in which top management must approve all agreements, financial directives, and mobility policies, another institution portrayed a more decentralized system in which each school functions autonomous and a commission made up of representatives from the international office and the schools operates independently. In a similar vein, Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrated a variety of models. One institution prioritized a decentralized, cooperative approach that directly involved international offices in putting EU-aligned strategies like ECTS into practice, while another followed a more centralized mechanism that required top management approval for partnership proposals. Responses in People's Republic of China also show variation. While, one institution noted a decision-making process guided by university management's risk analysis, another characterized a decentralized and independent academic environment based on its German heritage and a third highlighted joint decision-making between the administration and the international office.

In spite of these structural differences, what is common in the responses of the interviewees is their continuously emphasis about the reliance on the expertise and advisory role of international office professionals. Participants emphasized that international offices were viewed as experts who had the most thorough knowledge of pertinent procedures, and their recommendations and feedback had a big influence on decision-making, even in the most centralized structures. From another angle, the decision-making processes are further layered by committees, commissions, or faculty coordinators in certain institutions, which reflects more intricate and dispersed institutional hierarchies. All in all, this suggests that international offices play a significant role in the decision-making process, even though they do not have direct decision-making authority.

Table 6.6. presents of the findings pertaining to the sub-theme of "relations of IROs with university administration and institutional authorities: institutional hierarchy and decision-making in the EU higher education programs."

Table 6.6 Relations of IROs with University Administration and Institutional Authorities: Institutional Hierarchy and Decision-Making regarding the EU Higher Education Programs (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Decision-Making on EU Programs: Centralized or Decentralized?	Presence of varying perspectives regarding whether the decision-making processes in institutions concerning EU programs and internationalization efforts, in general, are centralized or decentralized	Reponses based on the dichotomy of decentralized vs. centralized decision-making varies among institutions	Presence of differing perspectives on centralized and decentralized decision-making approaches, with some institutions exhibiting a combination of both.
Role of the IROs	Emphasis on expertise, advisory role, and reliance on the proficiency of international offices	Emphasis on the advisory role of international offices and the reliance on their expertise	Examples in which international office's suggestions and ideas significantly influence and emphasize on the process office's role as a primary initiator, although final approval rested with top management.

6.1.5 Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: University Level

In order to investigate the function of International Offices as implementing units within the organizational hierarchies of the universities, specifically from the standpoint of bottom-up Europeanization, and to evaluate their possible impact on higher-level decision-making processes, the following inquiries were asked during the interviews: "*To what extent can your office influence intermediate or upper-level decision-making processes within your institution? Can you provide examples of instances where your office has effectively influenced policies or decisions at higher*

levels, specifically concerning the transfer of EU higher education programs and related mechanisms?"

First of all, it is important to highlight that, except for a few institutions in all three countries, the majority of participants reported that although its degree varies, the international office is influential in the decisions of the senior management regarding the EU programs and internationalization, and that concrete initiatives were sometimes created through the international offices as driving force.

In that regard, an analysis of the responses from institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan reveals varying perspectives on the influence of international offices within their respective universities. For instance, one institution emphasized the role of international office in starting Erasmus projects, but pointed out that because faculty members were involved, permission from university management was needed for larger projects like Jean Monnet projects. From another institution, the respondent highlighted a strong sense of being heard by upper management. As an example, the participant also explained that as international office they initiated a comprehensive plan (a map as they call) to boost the number of international students, which included actions like offering free dorm accommodations and scholarships, which was accepted by the upper management after being presented, as explained as follows.

> I always feel that my university, like top management is hearing me. For example, I asked if there is no dormitory, right? Or how can I invite international students if like, we are not proposing that some kind of scholarships. And I was proposing a program, we call it as the map how we can improve the number of international students and then it includes for example, providing scholarships, providing the free dormitory and all that points and I was proposing that on the level of the top management, and they have accepted (Institution K2).

Similarly, another interviewee explained the "Online Academy" as an example to show how their international office had a significant impact on the start of important initiatives and changes. Utilizing the university's distinct position as the only religious university with the authority to provide such content, this academy proposed by the international office was created for people looking for educational opportunities. The respondent clarified that after the proposal was delivered to the university's administration, the academy was recently opened in May 2024, complete with an

online application that allowed users all over Kazakhstan to access learning materials from the comfort of their own homes.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, although one of the interviewees indicated that their international office does not have much influence on upper-level decision making processes regarding the EU programs and internationalization, another one emphasized the international office's significant influence in decision-making, especially when it comes to assessing possible alliances and offering advice to the top management on capacity-building initiatives, including cautioning against unfavorable partnerships. Moreover, the participant highlighted the office's proactive role in launching impactful practices, like planning staff weeks, which were new to others at first, but gained widespread acceptance over time and expanded across industries like economics and sports, as detailed in the quotation below.

> We also, for instance, when we started to organize this staff week events, it was unknown to everyone except us. What was the staff week? What does it mean? Once they saw that people who are coming, they also meet with other professors and so on, they gave us like open hands, to organize whatever we want, and to include others and so on. Now we are on our 12th staff week, and we already have interest from different study fields to organize their own staff week, like medical staff week or we recently, we had the sport Erasmus sports staff week organized by our faculty of Sport and Physical Education. There's also one the economics. So, I can see that some of our activities that we do, they influence on activities and decision making at the university level (Institution B1).

In a similar vein, the key respondent from the third institution also indicated that international office has an influence on upper-level decision making and as an example of a practice initiated by the international office, the participant explained a centralized system for handling invitation letters ensuring that only the Vice Rector for International Cooperation could authorize such documents, with all related processes managed by the International Relations Office. According to the participant, through this way, the process was standardized and made more efficient at the institutional level by replacing the previous decentralized method, in which professors issued letters on their own without supervision.

Similar to institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of Kazakhstan, the answers from Chinese higher education institutions also show that international relations office have different levels of influence over high-level decision-making.

One interviewee highlighted significant autonomy and influence by demonstrating its ability to create initiatives at its level, such as the establishment of a credit-bearing people-to-people exchange course:

> (…) For the upper level, we have the policy, the initiative, but also for the lower level, and for my level, we do have the authority to build our program and to build that kind of things (…) And how we influence, we are doing this kind of job of some of the departments of my universities. We are now managing the international credits. We manage that kind of students need to study that kind of courses and to have that kind of credit, because international credit. And we build that kind of course from my department, from my office, we build that kind of international people to people exchange courses. It's called the people to people exchange courses. And practice. We are now building that kind of course and to led students to have that kind of credit for the internationalization (Institution C1).

Another interviewee described a conditional influence, pointing out that although international relations office had an influence in certain issues, it was not considered to be very critical. In a similar vein, a third interviewee highlighted its impact on students, especially by providing opportunities for international engagement, but reported having little control over the university's decision-making structures, as follows:

> I myself, no, I think I have quite limited influence there. I don't think we influence the decision maker of the university. It's more to the students, not up. And we also didn't change the structure of the university about that. So, yeah, I think lot of school, they have their own very strong idea. There we can't affect their decision. They affect our decision. I think it's more I may have influence on the student (Institution C3).

From a different point of view, for the fourth institution it was indicated that more than half of the decisions are taken by the administration. However, the participant stated at the same time that it was kind of a balance, in which they were happy and ready to accept, because their *"administration always makes the good decisions",* according to participant's statements. In contrast, another interviewee stated that they had an influence over the university administration and provided a noteworthy illustration of influence as the development of a medical program with the UK partners which was initiated by the international office. Similarly, the last interviewee reported a greater influence because their international office initiated and lead an international network which now has had almost 30 member universities across the globe.

To conclude, with the exception of a few institutions, most of the participants stated that their international office had an influence on the decisions about EU programs and internationalization and explained some particular implementations initiated by the international office itself. This is being said, however, the degree of this influence seems to vary according to the domestic, administrative and institutional structures, frameworks and priorities.

In that regard, examination of the Kazakhstani institutions' responses reveals different levels of influence that foreign offices have over decisions made at the university level. Examples include launching Erasmus projects, proposing comprehensive plans to the university administration to draw in international students, and development of cutting-edge projects like the "Online Academy," all of which highlight the important role international offices play in establishing institutional policies and carrying out successful programs. Similarly, international offices' impact on higher-level decision-making in Bosnia and Herzegovina also varies, with some organizations playing important advisory and decision-shaping roles, especially in capacity-building programs and partnership evaluation. The proactive and significant contributions of international offices to institutional efficiency and internationalization initiatives are demonstrated by examples such as the introduction of widely accepted practices like staff weeks and the standardization of institutional procedures, such as a centralized system for managing invitation letters. In a similar vein, responses from Chinese institutions also reveal varied influence exerted international offices on higher-level decision-making, ranging from significant autonomy in establishing initiatives like credit-bearing courses for international students to conditional or limited role which focused more on student engagement rather than direct influence on the top management. While some institutions demonstrated greater impact through collaborative decision-making processes, initiating international programs such as a medical partnership with the European institutions, and leading global networks with extensive membership, another one expressed their acceptance and satisfaction about most of the decisions taken by the administration which consistently made well-informed and effective decisions.

These differing degrees of influence imply the various operational contexts and institutional structures within different universities. While some international relations offices play a crucial role in defining strategic initiatives, others act more as supportive bodies, facilitating student opportunities or advising on administrative matters. This variation emphasizes how crucial administrative alignment, institutional autonomy, and IRO's strategic positioning are in determining their capacity to impact higher-level decision-making. The consequences of these differences may imply that while institutions with less influence might rely more on administrative leadership for strategic direction, those with more IRO influence from bottom up might be better positioned to launch transformative projects. Table 6.7 presents of the findings pertaining to the sub-theme of "influence on upper-level decisions: university level".

Table 6.7 Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: University Level (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
IRO Influence	Presence of influence of IRO on upper-level decisions at the university level	Presence of influence of IRO on upper-level decisions at the university level	Presence of influence of IRO on upper-level decisions at the university level
Instances of the impact of IROs on institutional-level decision-making processes	-Coordination of mobility programs -Development of map for internationalization -Development of online academy	-Suggestions for decision making on partnerships -Development of staff week	-Development of people to people exchange course -Development of medical program with the UK partners (attention of Ministry)

6.2 Strategic Role and Influence of the EU Programs in Institutional and National Policies

This second main theme highlights how the EU programs are integrated into national or institutional strategic planning, either supporting or opposing current organizational priorities and structures, and/or how EU programs have an impact on strategic decision-making at the national and institutional levels from the standpoint of

Europeanization. At the national level, this theme examines how EU programs influence broader national strategies for internationalization of higher education. Europeanization effect here is achieved through the soft power of the EU, where even without binding directives, EU programs help shape national policies. Analysis of national strategic planning in internationalization and the role of EU programs in this planning from the eyes of IROs is also connected with the EU's voluntary mode of governance or Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which refers to a learning and transfer process based on persuasion, soft incentives of guidelines, benchmarks and targets and non-hierarchical horizontal exchange and Radaelli (2003)'s question of "*can the EU affect national policy even in the absence of EU directives and regulations?*" This theme also addresses the role of the IROs as an implementing unit in the organizational hierarchy of the national structure and the extent to which IROs can influence the national-level decision-making about the EU programs.

6.2.1 Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in Strategic Planning

The purpose of this sub-theme is to ascertain whether the institutions that were interviewed has a specific internationalization strategy or if internationalization is incorporated into their overall strategic plan. Additionally, this part of the study aims to understand whether the EU programs are referenced in institutional strategies and planning, and to analyze role of these programs within such frameworks. In that regard, this sub-theme aims to explore whether the institution demonstrates a conscious effort to engage in or implement the EU programs as part of its strategic planning, or if these programs occupy no significant place in institutional planning, with internationalization strategies are made up of a variety of distinct elements. To explore these aspects, the following questions were posed to the institutions during the interviews; *"Does your university have an internationalization strategy? If yes, what does it encompass? Is it a part of a national strategy or your institution's own strategy? What kind of a role do the EU programs play in your university's internationalization strategy? Are they a part of your institution's strategic planning? For how long?"*

An analysis of the responses reveals that the most frequently mentioned aspect regarding institutional internationalization strategies is the use of quantitative indicators, cited by seven out of 13 institutions. These indicators typically aim to increase numerical figures such as mobility numbers, the number of international students and faculty members, international rankings, and the number of international projects. In contrast, qualitative indicators were mentioned by a smaller number of institutions (three out of 13) but are still included in the internationalization strategies of some institutions. These qualitative indicators focus on enhancing the quality of teaching and research, as well as improving international visibility and recognition.

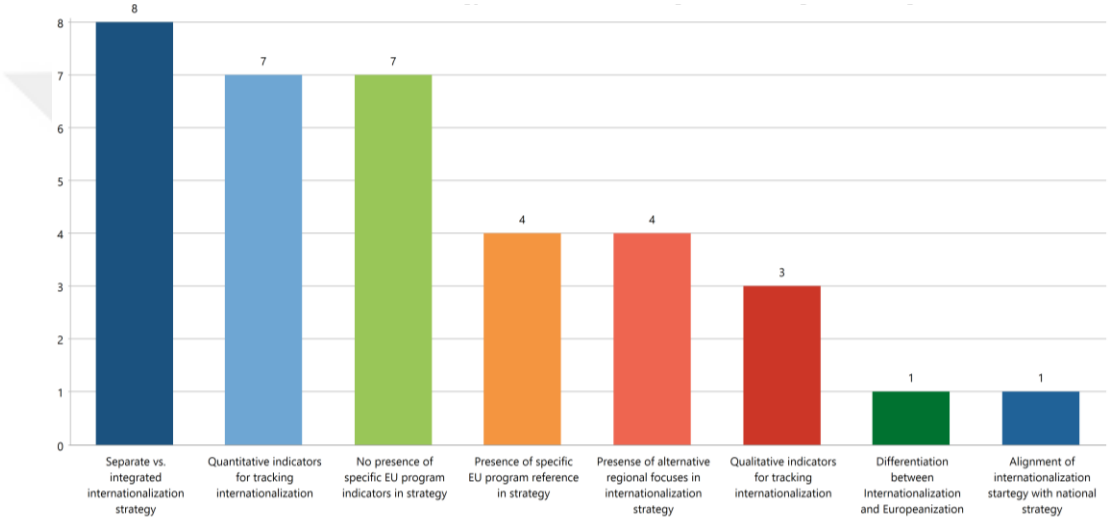


Figure 6.8 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in Strategic Planning.

Furthermore, another prominent finding from the general analysis is the limited reference to the EU programs in strategic planning. Responses indicating the absence of specific references to the EU programs outnumber those stating their presence. A significant majority of these responses came from institutions in China, with seven institutions explicitly stating that the EU programs are not part of their strategic planning. On the other hand, four organizations stated presence of specific EU program reference in their internationalization strategies. Additionally, four institutions, primarily located in China, stated that they do not concentrate on the European region but rather have other regional goals. Furthermore, three institutions

reported having a distinct internationalization strategy, whereas five institutions said that internationalization is a part of their overall strategic plan. Unfortunately, clear responses on this matter were not obtained from the remaining institutions.

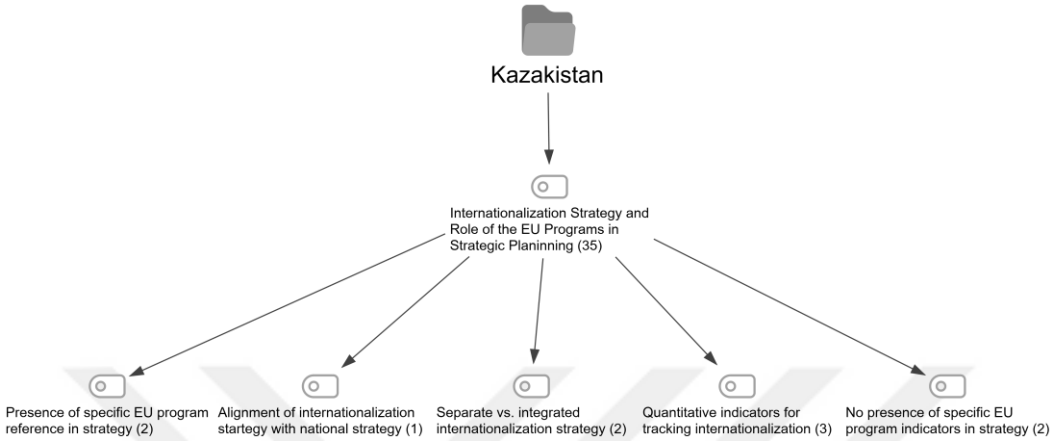


Figure 6.9 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in Strategic Planning (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

A country-by-country analysis of the responses, with a particular emphasis on the Republic of Kazakhstan, reveals that all three institutions use quantitative indicators to monitor internationalization. In this regard, one institution's strategic plans highlight current mobility rates, another emphasizes metrics like the number of programs, international faculty and students, and international rankings, and the third mentions objectives pertaining to the number of inbound and outbound student mobility. The following quotations provide examples of these responses:

> University strategy has four directions. And then one direction is basically the internationalization which includes rankings, international rankings, the number of programs, number of international students and the number of international faculty (Institution K3).

> The last strategy is until 2027. We modified it many times, but still, we are using that strategy. In shortly, we have indicators which we need to fulfill each academic year, I would say because, for instance, we have one indicator which relates to internalization of students. Like, how many students came to the University like this year? So it should be, let's say, 5%, next year it should be 10% something like that. Or how many students went like, outbound and inbound students, like how many went this semester. This academic year it should be 10, next 15%. So, we work using that indicator. And, let's say, how many foreign professors we have or how many professors went abroad and give lecture something like that. So, we use those indicators, and at the end of semester, we ask reports from professors from each department, like, how many

> professors went out and how many visiting professors we had this semester. So, we combine everything and change it to percentage and report it to rector and vice rector. it's part of general strategy (Institution K4).

Furthermore, regarding the role of the EU programs in internationalization strategies, the responses appear to be divided. Two of the institutions indicated that EU programs are part of their internationalization strategies, while the other two stated clearly that EU programs are not part of their strategies. Below are some pertinent responses indicating the presence and importance of the EU programs in their internationalization strategies.

> (…) EU programs are also mentioned because we are interested in all this funding for our students, staff and faculty members that will help for receiving more qualitative. Erasmus programs also have role in enrollment strategy also, because so we just advertise that there are many Erasmus program students or prospective students. We inform them that they can receive this mobility grant to study (Institution K1).

> In our university, EU programs play role in internationalization strategy. Of course, I think from 2013 when Erasmus started in the University, I think it plays main role, because also, first of all, students want, get this grant, depending on and also partners. After this program, they start to know about Kazakhstan, about university, our university. So, it's like a big communication, among universities in Europe. So, it has big impact, of course, on our strategy also (Institution K2).

Similarly, an examination of Bosnia and Herzegovina's responses shows that internationalization strategies place considerable emphasis on quantitative metrics. In their strategies, two of the three institutions specifically mentioned indicators like international projects, study programs, joint studies, international rankings, and mobility. One institution also emphasized qualitative indicators, citing objectives like maintaining competitiveness, attaining international standards in education, and improving international visibility and recognition. Additionally, in terms of internationalization strategy structure, one institution stated that internationalization is a part of its overall strategic plan, while two institutions reported having a distinct internationalization strategy. In a similar vein, two of the three institutions claimed that their internationalization strategies include EU programs, as explained as follows:

> (…) It is a university strategy. So, it has its own parts, and one of those is internationalization strategy. It is done every four years. So now we have recently finished one for 2024-2028, period, and it follows because we don't have national strategy as such, but we do have some priorities for higher education and national legal framework for higher education, which is followed, but as well as EU directives and EU focus on funded programs and so on, which is included in that

internationalization strategy. The focus is mostly on increasing mobilities, increasing study program, international study programs, increasing joint international study programs like joint studies and so on and international projects, especially on capacity building and staff training (Institution B1).

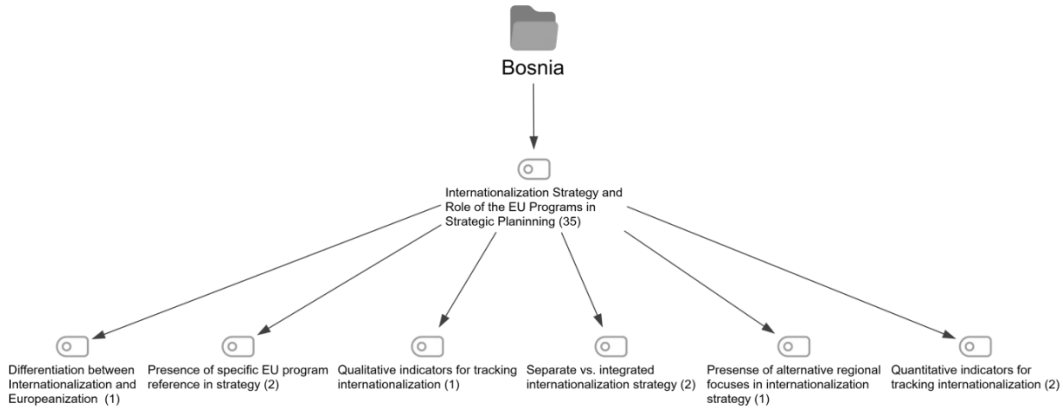


Figure 6.10 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in Strategic Planning (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

As a distinct example, one interviewee stressed that Europeanization and internationalization are not the same, despite the fact that it was not specifically prompted by a question or implied by the interviewer. As exemplified through below quotation, participant from this institution explained that the majority of its relationships and partnerships were not within the EU, on the contrary emphasized the growth of alternative regional alliances with China, Russia, and Serbia

They are [EU programs] one part of it [internationalization strategy]. They are created to help and support internationalization and it is their role. EU programs are always part of international activities at the university, but they are not only programs. We have very much developed regional cooperation, especially with Serbia, and also with Russian and Chinese universities. Internationalization and Europeanization are not synonyms in our opinion. A huge number of our contacts are with partners outside the EU and there is no pressure to cooperate only with EU. Also, our professors/scientists publish papers in prestigious scientific journals improving our visibility in science-research area, which also contributes to our ranking, visibility, and international recognition. This is also something outside the scope of EU programs. Relying solely on EU programs is very narrow window for internationalization in our case, and that is why we see them just as one part of international and internationalization activities, and that is why we use many other options and regions in the world to achieve international visibility (Institution B3).

When it comes to People's Republic of China, an examination of responses reveals that five of the six institutions indicated their internationalization strategies had no specific goals pertaining to the EU programs. Below are pertinent quotes that highlight this point.

> I have to be honest that we don't have many partners from the Europe normally, the students from China going abroad, and we don't know the Erasmus, right? We don't know it. So, I don't know how to use it. Nobody tells us. So, we can do it ourselves, so we don't need it, I think (Institution C4).
> I'm afraid it [EU programs] is not [part of the strategy]. I follow closely with EU Erasmus programs and for another Socrates, for example, I mean and like horizontal plus. But to be very honest, it is not part of the strategy, simply because it is not Chinese one. But we understand we are willing to work with our partners in EU countries to make sure these programs are well prepared (Institution C6).

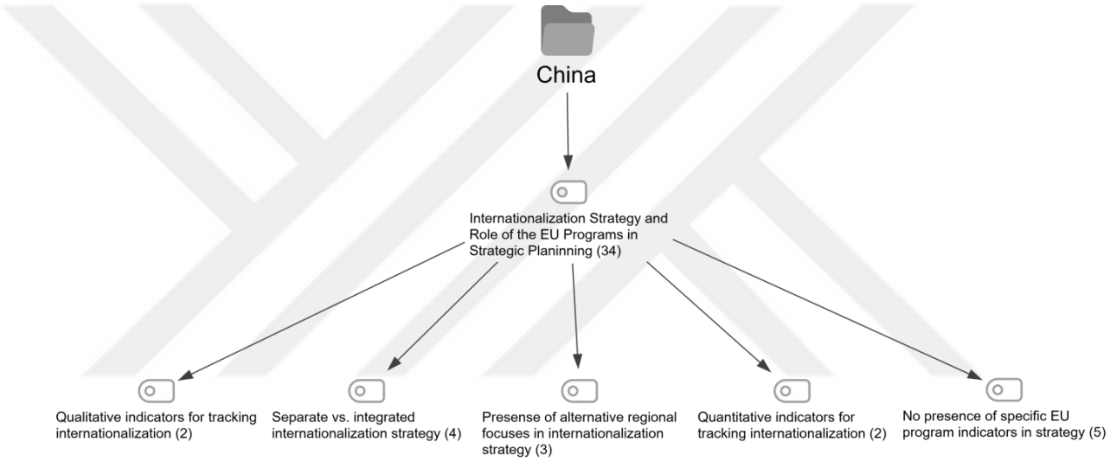


Figure 6.11 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in Strategic Planning (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

Furthermore, all three of these five institutions indicated that their internationalization goals are centered on regions other than Europe, and three of them named Southeast Asia as an alternative regional target. Examples of these responses are given in the following quotes.

> (…) We are close to the Southeast Asia. And we have a deep relationship with Vietnam and Thailand and Indonesia, with those in Southeast Asia countries. So, our key task on is not seeing the Europe, but in the Southeast Asia. (…) We don't have that kind of writing proposal for especially for the EU higher education programs. We don't have that, as I mentioned, our key point and our key tasks is to build a relationship with Southeast Asia countries, not the EU. (…)

> So, we don't have that kind of a special ability for the EU programs, we don't have that kind of thing (Institution C1).

> (…) For our university, due to this, historic connections, we have the founder from Malaysia, Singapore, and also a geographical advantage. We are close to Southeast Asia, countries, and regions (…) So, we are shifting back, our focus on the Southeast Asian countries and regions and this is also a part of focus now (Institution C5)

The existence of alternative regional targets, a lack of partnerships with Europe, a lack of knowledge about EU programs, and, in one instance, the simple reason that "it is not a Chinese initiative" are the reasons given for leaving EU programs out of their internationalization goals. Additionally, like in the other two countries, the interviewees from two institutions in China stated the presence of qualitative indicators in their strategies, and two more mentioned using quantitative indicators. While the quantitative goals are mainly focused on increasing the number of international students, the qualitative goals include aspirations like improving quality and becoming a first-class university.

To conclude, the analysis reveals that quantitative indicators, such as mobility numbers, the number of international students and faculty, and rankings, play a major role in institutional internationalization strategies in all three countries. Qualitative indicators, which emphasize objectives like improving quality, visibility, and competitiveness, are still important in some institutions even though they are not as commonly mentioned.

On the other hand, EU programs' contributions to these strategies vary by region and are not always consistent. Because of their lack of partnerships with Europe, unfamiliarity with the EU initiatives, and preference for other regional focuses like Southeast Asia, Chinese institutions do not tend to refer to the EU programs in their internationalization strategies. On the other hand, a more balanced approach is taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where certain institutions have included the EU programs into their plans. Kazakhstan's responses are mixed, with an equal number of institutions attempting to internationalize their programs by including or excluding the EU programs.

Additionally, another remarkable finding is that regional alternatives to the EU cooperation are becoming more prevalent, especially in China, where alliances with Southeast Asia are given priority. Furthermore, there are differences in how internationalization strategies are structurally integrated; some institutions maintain separate strategies for this purpose, while others incorporate it into their overall strategic plans. These results provide important insights into how higher education institutions manage international partnerships and strategic planning, highlighting the diverse approaches to internationalization influenced by institutional goals, regional priorities, and contextual dynamics.

A visual representation of the findings related to the sub-theme of "internationalization strategy and the role of the EU programs in strategic planning" is presented below.

Table 6.8 Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in Strategic Planning (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Most frequently cited elements of internationalization strategy	Quantitative indicators cited by three institutions (out of four)	Quantitative indicators cited by two institutions & qualitative indicators cited by one institution (out of three)	Quantitative indicators cited by two institutions & qualitative indicators cited by two others (out of six)
Role of the EU programs on the internationalization strategy	EU programs have a mixed role; two of the institutions indicated that EU programs are part of their internationalization strategies, while the other two stated clearly that EU programs are not part of their strategies	Incorporation of EU programs: two of three institutions claimed that their internationalization strategies include EU programs	Larger geopolitical and educational strategies over the EU initiatives; five of the six institutions indicated their internationalization strategies had no specific goals pertaining to the EU programs & existence of alternative regional targets

6.2.2 National Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in National Strategic Planning

The previous sub-theme has looked at the role of the EU programs within the institutional internationalization strategies, which international offices-main unit of analysis are in charge of implementing and frequently shape as experts. International relations offices are also responsible for implementing national strategies and internationalization approaches at the national level, which are now the main focus of this sub-theme. Through an analysis of the responses given by the key respondents, the purpose of this section is to determine whether or not national-level internationalization strategies and policymaking refer to the EU programs, and if so, what function these programs serve within the larger strategic framework at the national level. Inclusion of references to the EU programs in national-level planning is also closely related with the theoretical debate of whether the EU can use the Open Method of Coordination and other mechanisms to influence national policies especially in an area like higher education, where the EU does not have exclusive competence. The institutions were asked the following questions during the interviews in order to investigate these aspects: *"Is there a national strategy in terms of the EU higher education programs in your country? Who are the national actors of that strategy?"*

For the Republic of Kazakhstan, the National Erasmus Office in Astana is the most notable response pertaining to national strategies and authorities. The National Erasmus Office was mentioned by three of the four institutions, highlighting its support, guidance, coordination, and meeting-organizing functions as well as its proactive national promotion of the Erasmus program. Below are quotes that highlight these mentions of the National Erasmus Office.

> (…) Erasmus office, which is just established by Minister of Education, and they have on this organizational chart, there is a coordinator assistant and they just controlling all Erasmus grants which should be realized by Kazakhstan universities. And they also organize many events here in Almaty and also in Astana. And they also visit our universities. And also, they came to our university to just explain all these possibilities, and especially for faculty members and about this capacity building project. National Erasmus Office is promoting Erasmus programs in the country, and it is part of the Ministry of Education (Institution K1).

> We have Erasmus office here, like National Office in Kazakhstan, and they also make different meetings and zoom meetings with us. The head of the Office of Erasmus office, she is really cool. She also supports all the universities, if we you need any help, she's happy to help (…) She is also trying to help all universities to participate in different programs. Our office here, Erasmus office, is works really well. And last time we had offline meetings with all universities, and they explain us how other universities and [anonymous] is one of that university which wins a lot of, like, scholarships and so, and they showed us what kind of university won and how they work, and they tried to help us to contact with those universities so more experienced universities can share their experience with less experienced. I'm not sure about their strategy, but they are working really well, and they are trying to do like, as I said, more experienced universities, they help less experienced universities (Institution K4).

The Kazakh government's scholarships for international and mobility programs are another noteworthy example of a frequently mentioned answer. Similarly, three of the four institutions mentioned government scholarships, and one of them specifically stated that the majority of their significant funding comes from the government and that their allotted Erasmus quota is relatively low.

> Generally, the big funding we get is from our own country, for the mobility programs, for inviting international faculty to our university, we got the funding. It's either our own funding, or it's government funding (…) For the last 2 years, we didn't win the project, but we participate in Erasmus for I forgot the direction of the program, but when you do kind of a curriculum development. Because to be honest, it's not like we are getting a lot slots. It's like, maximum to five, this is not a lot at all right? So usually, all the mobility exchange programs, we do it by the own funding. And since the number of students is increasing, and then number of students who is ready to participate in that kind of programs, that's why the office is increasing. Unfortunately, it's not because of that Erasmus (Institution K2).

Additionally, regarding specific responses, one interviewee stated that they must raise the percentage of outgoing students participating in mobility programs to 10% of their overall student body as part of the national strategy, while another underlined their close cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and effort to match their institutional strategy with the national strategy.

On the other hand, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the focus on the country's multi-level governmental structure and complex administrative system is the most noticeable theme concerning national strategy and authority, according to the responses from Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions. In their responses, two of the three institutions emphasized this feature, but the third institution in this category provided insufficient information. In line with the bottom-up focus of this study, the responses from Bosnia and Herzegovina also underscored bottom-level dynamics,

such as references to the cantonal level**,** rather than portraying a centralized, top-down governance system. This observation aligns with the decentralized nature of Bosnia's political and administrative structure. Below are pertinent quotes that highlight these ideas.

> Because of the complex structure of the country, we have one country and two entities. One is Republic Srpska. One is Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina. Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina has 10 cantons. Each canton has its own ministry for education or higher education, depending on the canton. And they have their law on higher education and strategies and so on. The Srpska has its own. On the national level, there is no ministry for higher education or education. There is a Ministry of Civil Affairs. They have a department for education, but in most cases, everything, when it comes to strategic or legal, it happens on those lower-level bottom-up. We are reporting to the Canton of Sarajevo. Basically, Canton Sarajevo is our founder and Canton Sarajevo reports to the federal government, to the federal ministry, and federal ministry reports to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Department of Education. But what laws and everything that is done, it is all on the Canton level (…) So it is a very complicated to explain, but it somehow works (Institution B1).

In addition to mentioning multi-level and complex governance of the country, the interviewee from the second institution also stated the limited national funding and dependence on the international funding including the EU programs, as exemplified through the below quotation.

> Bosnia Herzegovina as a country does not support higher education as they should, because only 0.1% of national income is invested in, I think. It is very low money that we get from the state. So, EU projects, EU funding is something that this university really takes advantage of. Like I said, we just won the European University Alliance project, and it's going to do a lot of good for us, because we will use the money, we will get through those four years to make this an open Campus, a common campus, even to get some study programs completely in English, not just certain courses, but all programs. So, you know, we use EU funds for doing things at the university (Institution B2).

As can be seen in the following expression, this institution also stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina were not only financially dependent on the EU, but also deeply integrated with the EU's policies in all areas such as legal, political, and so on, which is evident in national policies, symbols, and regulations.

> (…) But the thing is that we are very connected to the European Union. We have the representative for EU, delegation for Bosnia Herzegovina. So, we are very connected to the EU, everything, all solutions made by the international community are in superior to the national legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I'm a lawyer by vocation, so I know that EU plays a very important role. For example, the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina was actually not something that we came up by ourselves, but the EU Commission. EU has influenced even the way that our national anthem sounds and our national flag looks like. So welcome to the Bosnian reality. We are connected to the European Union more than we want to (Institution B2).

Additionally, when the responses from Chinese institutions are concerned, reference to China's opening-up policy is the most common theme pertaining to national strategies and authorities in higher education internationalization. China's global engagement strategy, including the One Belt One Road initiative, was specifically mentioned by three of the six institutions, as exemplified below.

> We have some document about the opening of education to the outside world. We have that kind of open door to the outside world. We have that kind of education. We call it education policy or education document. And also, you know, we have that One Belt, One Road initiative (Institution C1).

> We have national strategies, it is said, we should open more to the world, and we should encourage high level cooperation with other countries (Institution C2).

> Do you know the One Belt, One Road strategy? The China is trying to be friends with these parts. So, for us, we would like to administrate more international students from that part, give them scholarship. So that's the strategy. This is a national strategy. Because the One Belt One Road is also about out of Europe (Institution C4).

Moreover, two institutions highlighted the hierarchical structure of Chinese higher education. As can be understood from the following expressions, the Double First-Class University Initiative was highlighted in these responses, which also explained that the government provides substantial support for internationalization initiatives at universities with this status.

> We are part of this double first-class university. Double first-class university means that the government wants to support a group of university to become the global, leading university. It's a strategy to support internationalization of universities in China. So, what we are doing actually are allied with the government's strategy (Institution C3).

> In China we have over 2000 University institutions, most of them right now, public institutions. And among the public institutions, there are different levels. And the top level is state, the government, state owned institution and mainly new, directly affiliated with the Ministry of Education of China. And that's the top level. Like we have probably 38 nearly 40 University listed among the top level. So, our university is one of that, and the rest of the institutions, some are provincial government level, some municipal government level. So, these are the rest of the institutions in China (Institution C4).

Furthermore, the most significant state agency in charge of internationalization in China was often cited as the Ministry of Education. One participant pointed out that the Minister of Education traveled to European nations in the post-COVID era, which they interpreted as a sign of increased cooperation and exchange between China and Europe. However, another respondent highlighted the absence of a specific department

or office within the Ministry that concentrates on EU-related projects and another two pointed out that national strategies lacked specific planning pertaining to EU programs. These observations show the limitations of national engagement with the EU as well as the organized government support for internationalization.

Finally, one of the specific responses that stood out, as included in the quotation below, was about the difficulty experienced by the university and international offices in establishing alignment between institutional and national policy.

> (…) First of all, we have top down [policy making]. That's the general guidance. That's the national policy. And then we should have a bottom up one, because sometimes this national policy might not be specifically identical to your own policy, you have to adjust yourself, make sure that you are coping with the national policy and also make sure that you can achieve what you need to be achieved. This is very important, and this is usually the most difficult part of our job (Institution C6).

To conclude, the examination of the responses from China, Kazakhstan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that each of these countries has a different approach to national strategies and authorities in the internationalization of higher education, which reflects the political and administrative circumstances of each of these countries. The National Office seems essential in Kazakhstan, where it coordinates and offers direction while actively promoting the Erasmus program. With a large portion of funding originating from domestic sources rather than the EU programs, government scholarships for mobility and international programs also seem critical and essential. On the other hand, the complex administrative structure and multi-level governance system are the main topics of discussion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Institutions highlight the decentralized nature of the system by emphasizing bottom-level dynamics, such as cantonal-level strategies. Also, there is a noticeable stress on the limited government funding for higher education and reliance on outside funding, including EU programs as well as the substantial alignment with EU policies in the legal, political, and other domains. Lastly, with responses that highlight the opening-up policy and international engagement strategies like the One Belt One Road initiative, China offers an alternative narrative. The Double First-Class University Initiative and the hierarchical structure of Chinese higher education serve as examples of how elite institutions receive the majority of government support for

internationalization. Although the Ministry of Education has a major role, responses also point out that national strategies lack specific EU program planning and have no department specifically focused on the EU.

These results highlight how crucial it is to comprehend both national and local dynamics when directing internationalization initiatives in higher education. In this sense, it is seen that the answers received in this section are compatible with many of the political and economic contexts expressed in the country background chapter regarding the countries and their relations with the EU. For example, it is seen that the majority of interviewees from the Kazakhstani institutions mention their governments' own scholarships and financial support. Although Kazakhstan's investments in education is below the level recommended by UNESCO, as a country standing out among Central Asian countries with its energy resources, its investment in education has tripled between 2007 and 2012 and according to the European Commission report, 20% of students receive government scholarships (Jones 2010; European Commission, 2012; Nessipbayeva & Dolayeva, 2013; Bednyakova, 2014; Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the participants mentioned the country's complex and multi-level governance structure, the government's inadequate investment in higher education and its dependence on EU funding. As mentioned in the country background chapter, Bosnia and Herzegovina higher education needs international financial support to rebuild the country and its institutions in the post-war environment (Gül & Gül, 2011), and the country's complicated governance structure makes this difficult. The EU has been the country's largest financial assistance donor since 1996; therefore, it can be said that in Bosnia and Herzegovina too, the responses are also consistent with domestic conditions and the country's relationship with the EU.

Lastly, as explained in the country background chapter, in order to transit from a centrally planned and labor-intensive economy to a market-oriented and knowledge-based one driven by innovation and global competitiveness, China has implemented a number of economic reforms since the implementation of the open-door policy in the late 1970s (Cai & Yan, 2017). In particular, as a result of globalization, pressure from the global economy, and the growing power of international organizations and

communication technologies, the Chinese government began to pay more attention to Western educational experiences and incorporate them into their own reformation process (Zhang & Yu, 2021). Therefore, the references of participants in China to country's opening up to the world in the early 1980s and the Belt and Road Initiative in the following years are also closely linked to the aforementioned country background and domestic circumstances.

Table 6.9 National Internationalization Strategy and Role of the EU Programs in National Strategic Planning (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Most frequently cited national authority and/or structure	National Erasmus Office	Multi-level governmental structure and complex administrative system	Ministry of Education
Most frequently cited national strategy/policy	Government scholarships for international and mobility programs	Limited national funding and dependence on the international fundings including the EU programs,	Opening up policy, One Belt One Road Initiative & hierarchical structure of Chinese higher education
Role of EU programs in national strategy	Active promotion and support through the National Erasmus Office, with limited influence from direct EU planning	Not only financially dependent on the EU, but also deeply integrated with the EU's policies in all areas such as legal, political, and so on, which is evident in national policies, symbols, and regulations	Limited or no direct integration of EU programs into national strategies, with a stronger focus on alternative regional

However, in contrast to Kazakhstan, where the majority of participants mentioned government scholarships despite their limited availability, it is surprising that none of the Chinese participants mentioned the country's substantial investments in higher education or the scholarships offered to international students. Considering that China is the second-largest economy in the world and plays a significant role in higher education worldwide, this omission is especially noteworthy. Moreover, as a highly centralized polity, the Chinese government is the main executive director, regulator,

and supervisor of institutional operations in addition to providing funding for higher education. With the Ministry of Education developing policies and regulations and the State Council establishing national educational guidelines, the governance structure entails a separation of administrative authority between the federal and local governments. Whereas provincial universities are under the control of provincial governments, central universities are run by the Ministry of Education and other central ministries, although they are still subject to central directives. In that respect, it is also surprising that the responses did not more clearly highlight the central authorities and their directives in light of this centralized governance system.

The results pertaining to this sub-theme of "national internationalization strategy and role of the EU programs in national strategic planning" are shown graphically above.

6.2.3 Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level

International offices are in charge of carrying out national laws and policies pertaining to international programs and EU higher education initiatives in addition to carrying out institutional decisions. In this sense, international offices are directly impacted by national policy decisions regarding internationalization and EU higher education initiatives. This sub-theme investigates if these offices have any influence on the national policymaking process. Any influence coming from these lower-level units would suggest the existence of a bottom-up impact on national decision-making processes regarding internationalization and EU programs, in line with the theoretical framework of Europeanization, given the bottom-up nature of the study. Interviewees were asked the following questions in order to look into this possible influence: *"Where do you see your office and your institution in this strategy? Can you share examples of instances where your office has successfully influenced policy or decision-making at higher levels with regard to the transfer of EU higher education programs and related mechanisms?"*

Responses to the question, however, mostly focused on how they affect institutional decision-making processes (a subject discussed in previous sections), offering little information about how they affect decision-making at the national level. This lack of

reaction is seen as a sign that international offices for these institutions either have little or no influence at the national level, or that there are no concrete examples to support this claim. The visual below illustrates how this question was primarily answered in terms of institutional-level influence, with eight institutions reporting an impact on institutional decision-making processes and one claiming no such influence. Some respondents gave broader answers, considering both levels and indicating if they had an influence on higher-level decision-making. In particular, four institutions mentioned their influence on national-level decisions, whereas one institution expressly denied any influence.

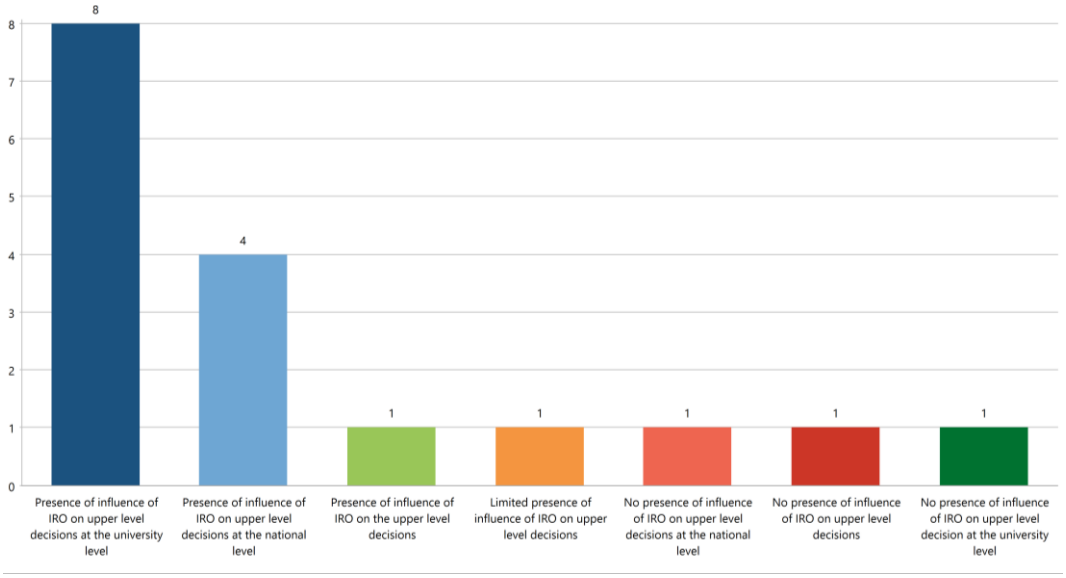


Figure 6.12 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level.

The country-based analysis that follows is inevitably based on a small number of responses in light of these findings. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, two out of four institutions provided answers about decision-making at the national level. According to one institution, their organization does not have direct communication with national authorities and, as a result, has no say in national decision-making. However, another institution presented an example of a course that was created during the pandemic with the help of the international office and then expanded to the national level with the Ministry's approval and even a national license was presented. This example shows

how a bottom-up initiative from an international office can have an impact at the national level; but it is still important to note that this example is not quite related with decision making processes on internationalization or EU programs. Below is the participant's statement about this example.

> For example, when it was a COVID times, there was a task for me to find some partner with whom we will collaborate to make online courses. And then we came out as the international office on developing a program to involve [anonymous] courses within our curriculum. So, we were giving the credits for some courses that students can take, because that was online time. And then we needed to create something different and, we came out to the point that our university have been doing that program for two years, when the COVID started. And after that, Ministry started to ask us how we have implemented that. And from the last year, it is like [anonymous] course came to Kazakhstan, on the level of the Ministry, because we bought it as the private university. And then Ministry bought that license to give the access to all students around the Kazakhstan to take the courses. And we have organized several events to explain how we have implemented that, because no one knew how to work with that, credits counted, how we find the courses and all that points. And still now when the Ministry is trying to translate some courses into Kazakh, but they do not know what kind of courses to propose for the translation. And they ask from us, what kind of courses from computer science, it's better translation. So, it is now in the level of like that, but all started when I was e-mailing all the points with whom we can make such kind of a contact (Institution K3).

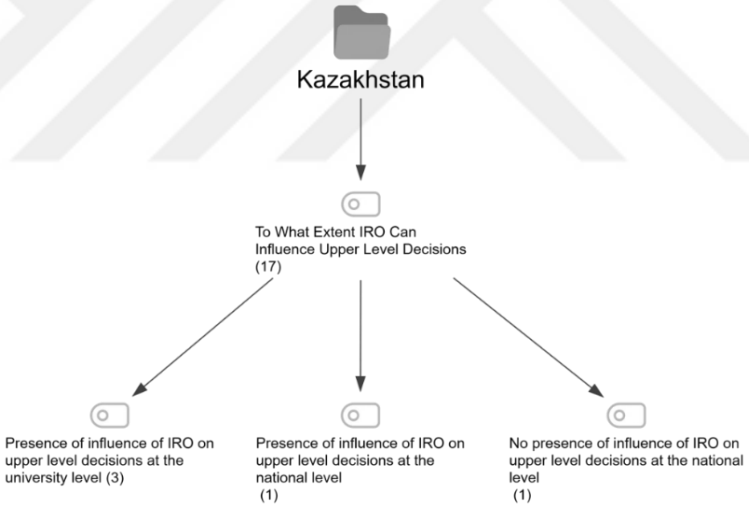


Figure 6.13 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, one interviewee responded to the question by discussing their impact on institutional-level decision-making instead, while another claimed to have no influence on both the institutional and national levels. One participant did, however, provide an example of how international offices worked together to lower

the quantity of paperwork that national authorities needed for residence permits for international students. This example shows how international offices can work together to start a bottom-up project that can affect national authorities and internationalization-related decision-making processes. Below is a quote pertaining to this example.

> As international relations officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we had a big campaign because for a mobility student coming from Türkiye, if he has gray or green passport, that person doesn't need to do temporary residents, because they have a right to diplomatic ID, which means that we only register them and that's it. But if that person doesn't have a father or mother working in a public institution and having that kind of passport, then they have to get temporary residents to stay legal in Bosnia, and they do it after they arrive. When I started working at this office, they were in total 25 different documents to collect. Then we started with the campaign. Now they only need to collect 13 documents, which is an improvement, and we're hoping to even get to the point where we are going to have only up to 10 documents to collect, not more. I spoke to international officers from [anonymous] university, from another [anonymous] university and we said we need to start telling them that this is not acceptable. The 25 different documents are too much. So now it's 13, and we're kind of hoping to squeeze to 10 (Institution B2).

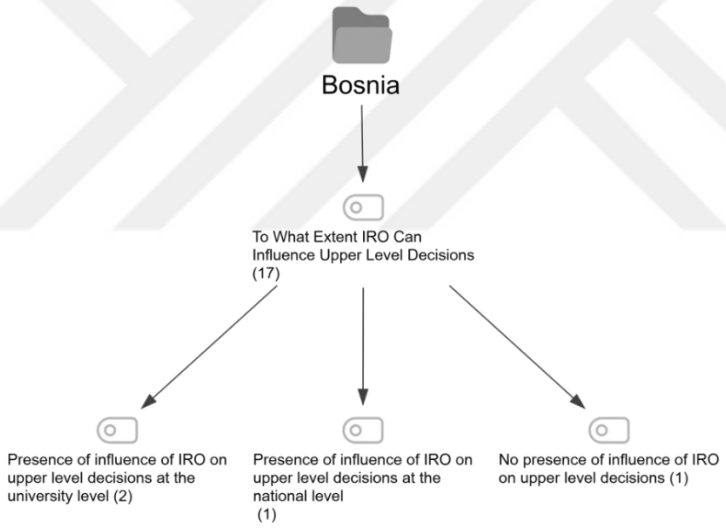


Figure 6.14 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Lastly, the responses coming from Chinese institutions are analyzed, while others concentrated on their effects at the institutional level, two institutions in China claimed to have an influence on decision-making at the national level. Interestingly, one institution mentioned a "secret initiative" involving cooperation with national

authorities and emphasized its capacity to make proposals to national policymakers, which could impact decision-making. A quote about this can be found below.

> For the upper level, we have the policy, the initiative, but also for the lower level, and for my level, we do have the authority to build our program and to build that kind of things. We have that kind of thing (at the national level), but it's kind of a secret for us, but I can say that we can write some proposal to the to the upper government, and when they see those proposals, they it may affect their decision making (Institution C1).

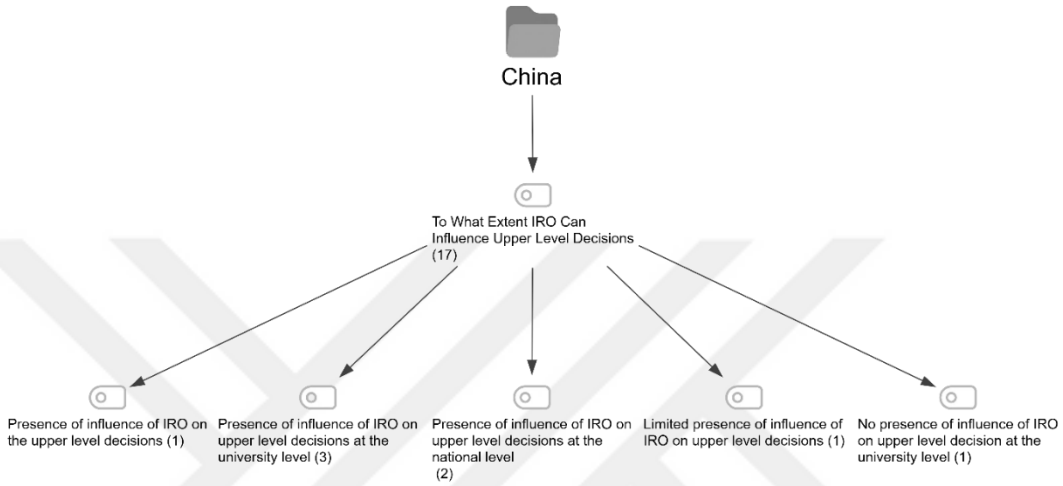


Figure 6.15 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

On the other hand, the other interviewee made reference to an international network that they had previously mentioned and that currently has about 30 member institutions (the quotation initially stated that there were 23). With network representatives prominently featured in high-level visits, this network has gained recognition from the city government and played a significant role in lobbying their government at the federal level. This case represents a bottom-up initiative that has had a major impact on internationalization processes at the national level. Below is a quotation regarding this initiative and its impact on the national level.

> [Anonymous] network [an international network initiated by the university] is very good example. [Anonymous] network, we started nearly six years ago with my friend by my side and at that time, not the normal way to do it, just like it is initiated by the government, and the government will assign you with a relevant budget. We sign you with the authority do it. But [anonymous] network we started from scratch, by using our own network, by using our own resources, even on our own budget. So, it grows up from a baby in the cradle. Now it grows up with a comparatively good alliance with more than with 23 members covering all over the world.

> And this is also a good example how we can lobby our university, our government. And now the city government takes on us very attentively, because for every, leaders visit to the international city, and we are always in the front. This is a very much a good example (Institution C6).

My initial assumption was that international offices would have a relatively small impact on national-level decision-making processes in China because of the country's more centralized governance structure. China, however, submitted most of the positive responses to this topic. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, where the state structure is more decentralized and functions at the cantonal level, one could anticipate that international offices would have a bigger say in government decisions with bottom-up mechanisms. However, in contrast to this expectation, Bosnia and Herzegovina only offered one example of this influence.

To conclude, the responses show that although international offices have a larger influence on institutional decision-making, there are few instances of their influence on decisions at the national level. A small percentage of responses gave specific instances of national-level engagement, with the majority focusing on institutional-level influence. Although they are uncommon and not always connected to internationalization or the EU programs, examples from China and Kazakhstan show that bottom-up initiatives, like program expansion or collaborative networks, can occasionally have an impact on national authorities. One example of how international offices can support change at the national level is a joint initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina to streamline residence permit procedures. However, the fact that at least one institution from each country offered an example of their impact at the national level is encouraging. These examples show that international offices have the ability to influence national policies on internationalization and EU programs through bottom-up initiatives, even though this influence is still more limited compared to their institutional impact. Such initiatives could be a sign of the potential to influence more significant changes in national-level decision-making in the future, especially if they are supported by joint projects among international offices in the same country.

A visual representation of the findings related to this sub-theme of “influence on upper-level decisions” is provided below.

Table 6.10 Influence on Upper-Level Decisions: National Level (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Number of institutions responding to this question	Two institutions provided answer and one of them indicated no influence at the national level decision making	Two institutions provided answer and one of them indicated no influence at the national level decision making	Two institutions provided answer and both of them indicated presence of influence at the national level decision making
Instances of the impact of IROs on national-level decision-making processes	Development of a course which expanded to the national level with the Ministry's approval	Influence on bureaucratic documentation process & collaboration with other universities to address bureaucratic inefficiencies	Offering proposals to the government & development of an international network of higher education
Nature of influence	Bottom-up initiative through Ministry collaboration on a specific course	Collective bottom-up initiative addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies in international student processes	Strategic proposals and advocacy via international networks recognized at the national and federal government levels

6.3 Pressures, Challenges and Decision-Making Dynamics in Policy Adaptation

From the perspective of policy transfer, this theme includes sub-themes of pressures from national and university administrations aiming to determine whether transfer of the EU higher education programs, rules, and regulations is something that IROs voluntarily choose to do or if higher-level authorities are pressuring them to do so. Put another way, this theme encompasses the outside forces that IROs encounter to transfer policies, such as modifying EU programs while negotiating national and institutional laws. Furthermore, IROs may experience indirect pressure from the EU as well as from national and/or institutional authorities; yet bottom-up Europeanization emphasizes that adaptational pressure can originate from a variety of sources, including the EU, other organizations, and international competition.

Moreover, this theme includes the sub-theme of legal and institutional obstacles difficulties which refers to the necessity of selective adaptation and show limitations to direct policy transfer and closely related to the framework for policy transfer in that sense. The transfer processes can be constrained by a number of institutional and structural factors, including ideological incompatibility, political, bureaucratic, and financial resources, bureaucratic size and efficiency, technological capabilities, and the complexity of the policy or program itself, according to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996). The transfer process is affected by institutional and legal constraints, which imply that although policies may be transferable in theory, real-world constraints may force partial or altered adaptations.

6.3.1 Pressure from University Administration on the IROs

The purpose of this sub-theme is to investigate whether institutional management puts any pressure on international offices with regard to internationalization and EU initiatives. In order to investigate this, participants were asked the following questions: *"Do you feel a pressure coming from your university administration for being part and effectively implementing these programs? If yes, how?"* Since international offices frequently answer directly to the rector or a designated vice rector, as was noted in previous sections, it is likely that any pressure of this kind would come from these high-level management figures.

Analyzing the dynamics of participation in the EU programs within the framework of Dolowitz and Marsh's policy transfer model requires an understanding of whether such pressure exists. In particular, it enables us to determine whether international offices participate in these programs voluntarily, under institutional pressure (coercive transfer), or as a result of indirect pressures from elements like global competition and rankings, which, although less overt, may nevertheless amount to coercion.

A broad examination of the responses in this context, as shown in the graphic below, reveals that six institutions were stated to experience institutional pressure to accomplish higher numbers in terms of internationalization and the EU programs. Furthermore, one institution was indicated to have similar pressures regarding regional

engagement, while another was emphasized some pressures to enhance quality. However, it is also important to note that a sizable portion of institutions—four in all—were reported that their interactions with university administration were more cooperative than coercive. Also, one interviewee simply and briefly responded "no", stating that there was no institutional pressure in their case.

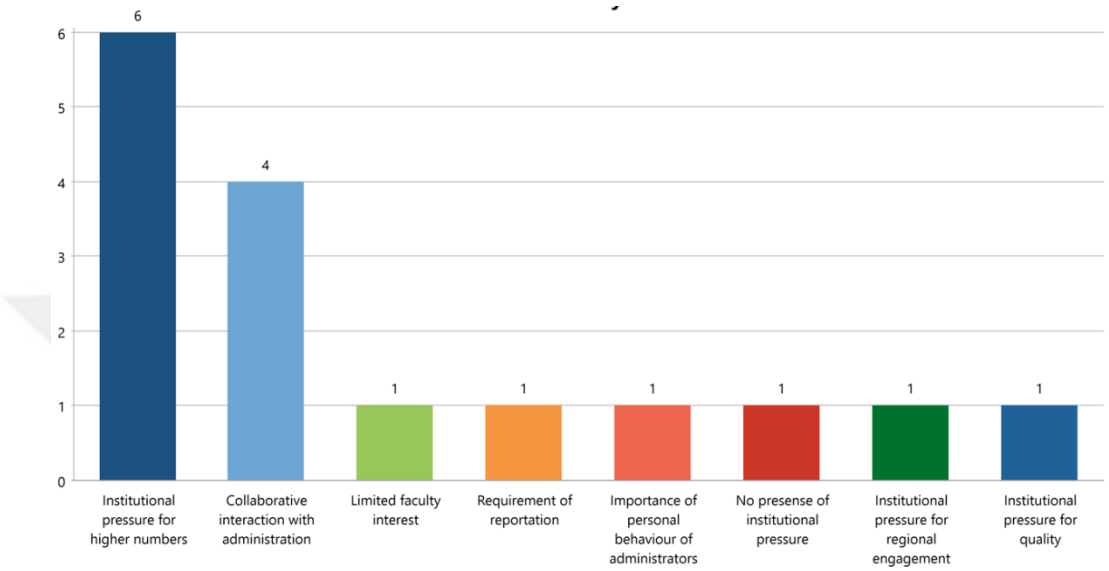


Figure 6.16 Pressure from University Administration on the IROs.

The country analysis of the responses from the Republic of Kazakhstan, reveals that two interviewees voiced that they were under institutional pressure to reach higher numbers. Since the number of international students, agreements, projects, and faculty members are among the criteria used in evaluations for international rankings, this is one of the most often mentioned themes in the overall analysis. Therefore, it makes sense that institutional leaders would focus their efforts on raising these numbers. However, a number of institutional factors, including organizational capacity, the number of employees in international offices, and the availability of housing capacity for incoming students, are closely related to this pressure. As an illustration of how internal dynamics can further impact this situation, one of these interviewees indicated that the pressure to increase numbers was complicated by the limited faculty interest. Below are some quotes that have expressed pressure to boost their quantitative metrics such as the number of international students and staff.

> It's again, like about the numbers, and then again, about being a part of European projects. Because they look what kinds of projects do you implement and the international level. And then if there is no interest from the faculty? (…) International Office, as I believe, it's the office who is doing the specific tasks. [But] it has to come from the academic staff, not from the international point. They also have to be interested on that. So, I think this is the main problem probably in my university and I know that it's not only my notice the problem within my colleagues within the country (Institution K3).

> Yes. Actually, they are interested, of course, in this mobility programs for students, for faculty members, and they want to send more faculty members as we can, and also for staff members, they also asking us to apply for Erasmus projects with many universities as we can so there is some pressure (Institution K1).

"Collaborative interaction with administration" was another frequently cited theme in the overall analysis, as two other institutions defined their interactions with university management as more collaborative than pressure driven. One of these interviewees underlined that their schools were autonomous and that their rector believed in potential of their international school. While they are occasionally obliged to submit reports, according to another institution, this cannot be viewed as pressure because their unit manages participation in such programs on its own.

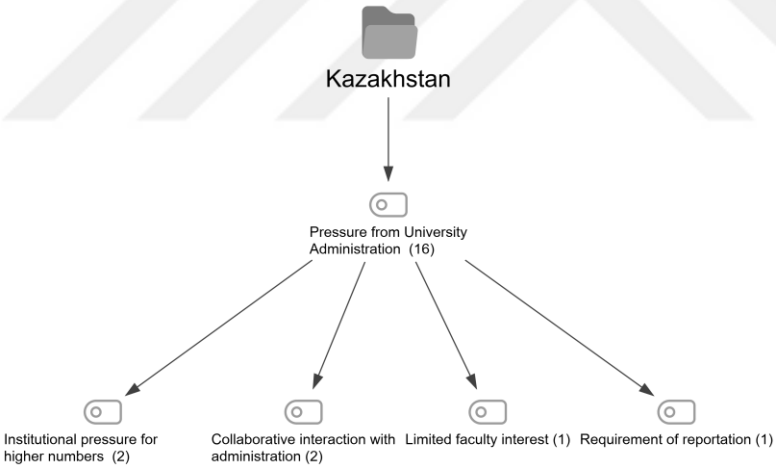


Figure 6.17 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Pressure from University Administration on the IROs (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

Among the responses from institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one interviewee simply and briefly responded "no," indicating that there was no institutional pressure, but did not specify any further details. Another interviewee declared the presence of institutional pressure to increase numbers related to internationalization and EU

programs. Yet, it also notable that this pressure depends on who is in leadership positions and the behavior of these individuals. This viewpoint is illustrated by the following pertinent quotation.

> I think they are always thinking about the numbers, about everything. But again, we don't have the university budget. As a public institution we received from the ministry. So, everything, even when it comes to mobilities and when it comes to hiring new people, it's never the university, it's the ministry. They said, no, they decrease the number or so on. So, it's always to blame someone else. But yes, we have a pressure to work more to provide more, and so on. (…) And then it depends on who comes to the management. Sometimes they understand that. They understand that you can work and work, but sometimes you have this framework which you cannot think outside of the box or work outside of the box. But when somebody comes who don't have any experience in in internationalization and how all the things work, then it can be a clash of opinions and thinking (Institution B1).

The third interviewee, however, reported a cooperative engagement with institutional management, highlighting that the management was keenly aware of the institution's capabilities and its internationalization constraints. Quite the opposite, according to this participant, the international office puts pressure on itself to perform better. This viewpoint is also reflected in the quotation that follows.

> No, I don't feel pressured above because they know I'm doing good everything I can, and they know that I'm also the one who always pressuring myself to do better. But they are also very aware that we are a small, academic community and I already informed my vice rectors and rectors that we will never have more than that. Our top limit for the universities we can have agreements with, they cannot go over 70 because we are a small university, so it cannot be done. And whoever tells you that we can, it can be 22 people working the office. But still, this university has done 5000 students. So, there is a limitation in how many students you can welcome, and you can send, and you're limited, not by the number of people working in the office, but by the size of the University (Institution B2).

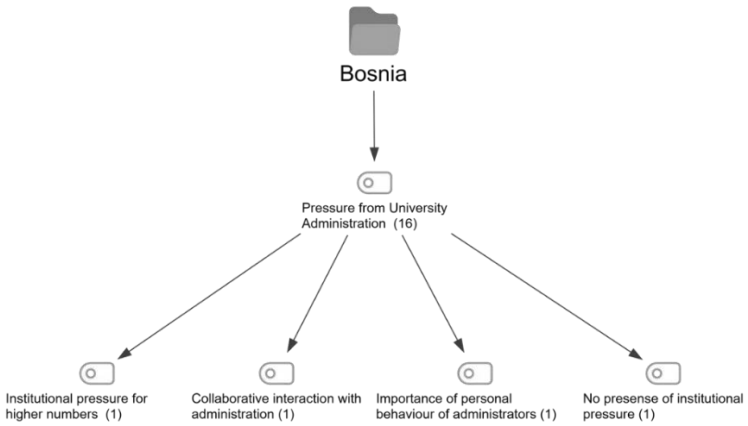


Figure 6.18 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Pressure from University Administration on the IROs (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Finally, the analysis of the responses from the Chinese institutions reveals that the most commonly mentioned category was institutional pressure for higher numbers of international students, staff, projects and so on, which was reported by three institutions. These participants emphasized feeling pressured to raise quantitative metrics like the number of projects, international rankings, outgoing students, and international students. Below are pertinent quotes that demonstrate these answers.

> From the university administration, from a president, our current president, he's very much focused on the increase of a number of international students, and also our students, domestic students going abroad. And this is of course, good for the cultivation of the international talents, but also good for the university rankings. In this point of view, we have the pressure from the president or university administration that we need to do more in terms of the admission of international students (Institution C5).

> I think for international office, maybe they get pressure, because this could be their performance indicators in the end of the year to show how many research projects they have, how many new projects they get for the university, and how many students they send abroad, how many students they receive here, this something show their workload and performance of the year (Institution C3).

On the other hand, only one interviewee stated that they had a collaborative interaction with the university administration. According to the quotation that follows, this participant stated that they would prefer to have greater administrative pressure actually and even that they were discouraged by its absence. *"No. Sometimes I even feel discouraged to work on that actually (...) I don't think there is pressure. I hope there could be more pressure or more support from the institution to show that they care about this." (Institution C3)*

Furthermore, another interviewee declared institution's pressure to improve quality, while other one reported feeling little pressure or direction for regional engagement, in contrast to the responses from other countries, as demonstrated in the following quotation.

> From my university, maybe a little bit [pressure]. For our university, we just emphasize for our whole province, emphasize the relationship with Southeast Asia. So, while we build our program, we just want to build our program and ask our students to go to Southeast Asia and welcome Southeast Asia students to come to China and to learn in my university. So that's kind of, maybe a kind of a pressure, but we do that for many years, at least 40 or 50 years, we have the relationship with Vietnam, with the Southeast Asia (Institution C1).

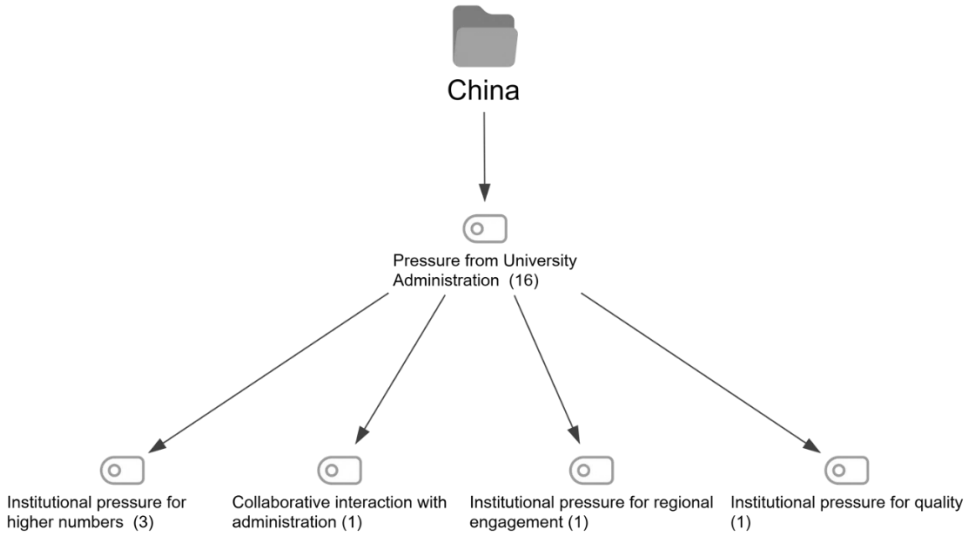


Figure 6.19 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Pressure from University Administration on the IROs (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

My initial expectation was that participants from China would express more pressure due to strict and top-down governance system which would also extend from national level to the institution level. However, the results reveal a more complex and nuanced picture than I had anticipated. Though as a frequently mentioned theme in all of the countries examined, institutional pressure to attain higher quantitative metrics—like rising international student numbers, agreements, and rankings—was also expressed by Chinese institutions, but considering the above expectation, it was still less prevalent than expected.

Increasing quantitative metrics, including the number of international students, faculty involvement, projects, and rankings, were the most commonly reported sources of pressure in all countries. This makes sense considering how important these figures are to global competitiveness and rankings. Even in these situations, though, this kind of pressure was not portrayed as directly coercive effort, rather indirect impact of competition and global rankings.

Moreover, quite number of institutions described their relationship with university leadership as collaborative, with management later supporting bottom-up initiatives started by international offices. This cooperative dynamic provides a hopeful

perspective, implying that international offices actively participate in forming institutional strategies through communication and collaboration rather than being passive recipients of top-down orders.

Also, the answers show that domestic factors, such as organizational capacity, administrator leadership style, and the particular circumstances of each institution, have a significant impact on institutional pressure. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, one institution pointed out that the pressure to expand varied depending on the priorities and conduct of leadership, whereas in Kazakhstan, it was associated with faculty interest and institutional resources. Furthermore, a common theme among the three countries was cooperative engagement with administration; multiple institutions described cooperative relationships in which international offices were given the authority to independently manage their initiatives. These results highlight how localized dynamics within individual institutions shape institutional pressure more so than national governance frameworks.

The summary of the findings in this sub-theme of "pressure from university administration on the IRO" is presented in the table below.

Table 6.11 Pressure from University Administration on the IRO (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Pressure or collaborative interaction?	Both collaborative (2) and pressure (2)	Both collaborative (2) and pressure (1)	Mostly pressure (5) and slightly collaborative (1)
Pressure for what?	For quantitative targets	For quantitative targets	For quantitative and qualitative targets and regional engagement
Institution-specific issues	-Limited faculty interest -Requirement of reporting	Importance of personal behavior of administrators	Not applicable

6.3.2 Pressure from National Authorities

As discussed in the sections above, international offices are abided by national laws, rules, policies, and guidelines that are issued by national authorities in addition to institutional regulations and decisions. While the previous sub-theme investigated whether institutional management exerts pressure on international offices concerning internationalization and EU programs, this sub-theme looks at the same topic from a national perspective. With regard to internationalization and EU programs, this section specifically examines whether national authorities put some sort of a pressure on or direct international offices. In order to investigate this, the participants were asked the following questions: *"Where do you see your office and your institution in this strategy? [Do you feel a pressure coming from the EU itself or your national government, international authorities, rankings etc. for being part of these programs? Or is it the HEIs themselves that force the governments to be more internationalized?] "*

The degree to which international offices may autonomously shape their institutional internationalization strategies is another important concern of this analysis. In situations where national authorities exert pressure, institutional strategies must inevitably be modified to conform to national policies, as national strategies are not always in line with institutional ones. As with the previous sub-theme, this section aims to ascertain whether international offices' efforts concerning internationalization and EU programs are motivated by direct pressure from national authorities, indirect pressures like international competition and global rankings, or are voluntary overall. In that regard, this analysis is very much in line with the policy transfer framework created by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) and their discussion of degrees of transfer.

Furthermore, this analysis aligns with the bottom-up Europeanization framework's notion of adaptational pressure. Bottom-up Europeanization emphasizes that the EU, other international organizations, and international competition are just a few of the sources of adaptational pressure. In that regard, this viewpoint offers a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional strategies are shaped by both domestic and international forces, especially when it comes to internationalization and

EU program practices; hence the adaptational pressure does not have to come from the EU.

Given these results, seven institutions were indicated not to experience direct pressure from national authorities, whereas five institutions were stated to have it. Furthermore, two interviewees reported that they engaged with national authorities more through cooperation than coercion, and two more mentioned the indirect pressure that they experienced as a result of global rankings. Moreover, another interviewee reported feeling indirect pressure to adapt their strategies to the national context in order to preserve their institutional status, while another interviewee emphasized pressure from accreditation agencies rather than the government.

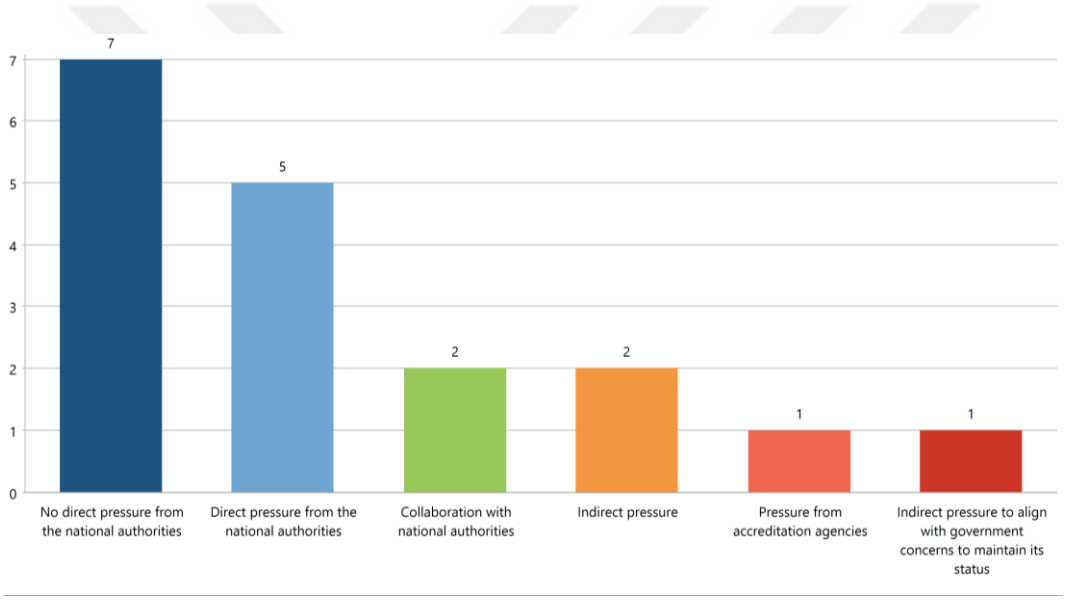


Figure 6.20 Pressure from National Authorities.

Consequently, considering these differing answers, it is not really possible to draw the conclusion that most institutions either operate under the influence of national authorities or are not influenced or guided in any way. The responses are relatively balanced, highlighting how national and institutional contexts shape these dynamics. This implies that the influence of national authorities varies greatly based on the particular institutional and domestic conditions under which these universities operate on particular issues such as global rankings and accreditation processes, both of which could be easily related to internationalization.

Once analyzing the country-specific answers, specifically those from Kazakhstan, it becomes evident that the balanced distribution seen in the responses as a whole is also present here. In particular, two interviewees indicated that they felt pressure from national authorities, while two others stated that they did not.

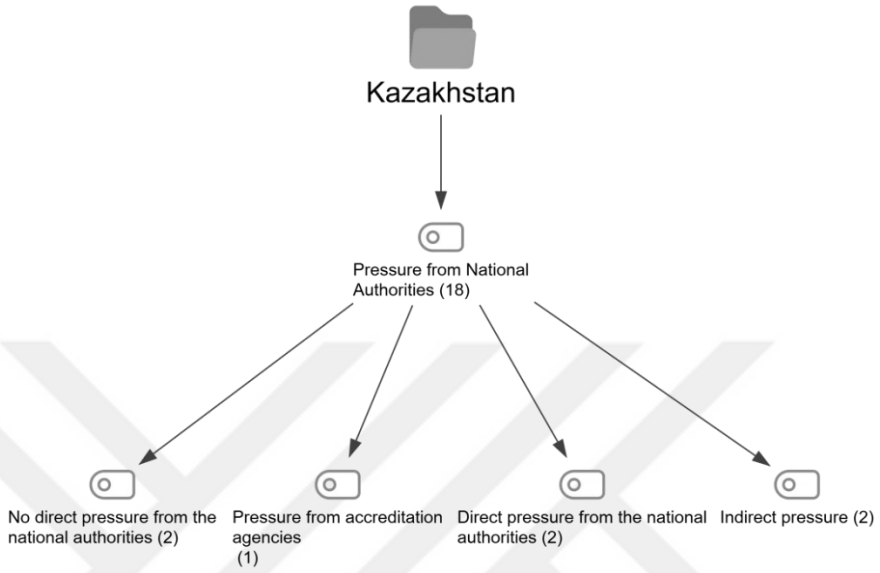


Figure 6.21 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Pressure from National Authorities (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

According to two interviewees that reported feeling under pressure, the main focus of this pressure is on raising quantitative targets, with national authorities establishing precise numerical and proportional objectives. While one interviewee talked about the difficulties for their institution in reaching these goals, the other focused on the bureaucracy and administrative burden associated with reporting to national authorities. Below are pertinent quotes that demonstrate these points.

> In terms of the ministry side, we feel the pressure because they put some numbers. And not all universities fit that numbers. For example, if we say about the number of international students they want from us, not all the universities can do that. And there is like, super several. It's not just one reason because there is no things like that. And therefore, when I see the strategy, and that we are aligning that strategy to our own strategy. And university, they asked me to do that, I feel like this is impossible, I cannot do that. I mean, you're not giving me any kind of instruments to implement that. I have to have incoming exchange students that number, but, for example, I don't have a dormitory for that. And where I should allocate them? (Institution K3).
> (…) They require some reports. Sometimes they require some percentage in terms of internalization and such kind of stuff. So, there is a little bit pressure, a little bit and because in this part, I guess it's a little bit our system (…) here in Kazakhstan, it's a bit like a lot of

> documents, a lot of like commission come and they check your documents, like can you show me the proof if you really send the student. So, there are a lot of document stuff bureaucracy and also reports at the end of each semester, you need to report how many students arrived or left. So, I guess it's a little bit like pressure (…) (Institution K4).

Similarly, two interviewees specified that they did not feel any pressure from national authorities; instead, they emphasized that they pressured themselves to increase their performance or thought that it was their responsibility to fulfill. Below are pertinent quotes about this viewpoint.

> No, we don't feel this pressure from this national Erasmus Office or Ministry of Education, just by ourselves, which projects should we apply for. And there's not so many pressures from them, maybe because they also cannot impact this Erasmus European Commission, and they have their own governmental grants for mobility programs (…) (Institution K1).

> (…) Our department is autonomous, and we have other schools, for example, School of Management, School of Digital Engineering, etc. We don't feel a pressure like from them because we find partners for them. We help them. So, there is not any pressure from other departments or something like this. But it's like our own responsible fulfillment like this. Because we know that it's kind of, we have impact in university, so we know that we should do like our best (Institution K2).

Additionally, one of these institutions reported feeling pressure from accreditation agencies rather than from national authorities. Furthermore, two institutions reported feeling indirect pressure from global university rankings. Below are quotes that also express these opinions. *"We don't feel like pressure, but we know that it's very important to do it because of the ranking strategy, etc., so that's why we do it (Institution K2)"*

> I actually believe that this is not only the government just say yes, let's do that number, right? Because for example, we are also pressured by the rankings, international rankings, they also have some point for international students. And again, for example, if we are creating our strategy, what we look for the national strategy, and we look for the ranking right? Because we would like to make our position in a higher point (…) (Institution K3).

The general balanced distribution of answers is also evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two institutions stated that they worked closely with national authorities. According to one interviewee, when national strategies were being developed, the university and its international office were consulted. Similarly, the other one highlighted a personal connection with national authorities, noting that all important officials knew her personally.

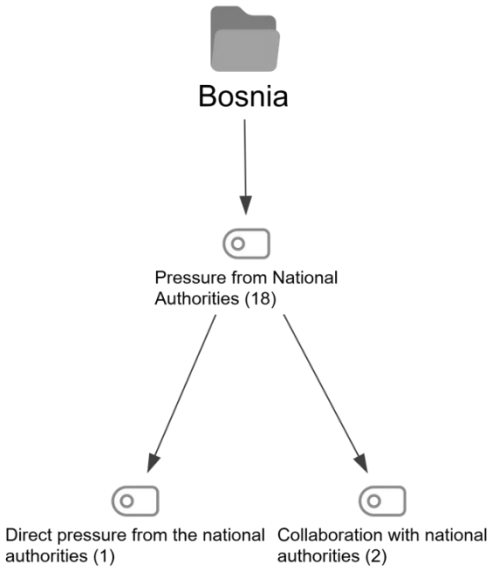


Figure 6.22 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Pressure from National Authorities (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

However, one of these interviewees also mentioned feeling pressured by national authorities at the same time. Hence, the findings of this university's interviews show pressures associated with managing the international and EU programs as well as cooperative relationships with national authorities. According to the responses of this institution, there is pressure to meet quantitative goals and raise internationalization-related metrics like the number of international students. Below is a quote that is pertinent.

> We are definitely consulted every time when the strategy was written to provide our parts (…) So I would say it [our office] plays an important role, especially in developing. International Office is always consulted in some strategy, strategical things that are happening on cantonal, federal, or even national level. We are always there. But I think we are always there because we work a lot, so we actually created the brand (…) so we are always invited in different commissions to provide some inputs and so on. But I think when it comes to higher education, international relations office should be part of the decision. I wouldn't say the decision making, but definitely input on how to do and what to do and so on. (…) They all expect from us to increase the number. What they don't understand is that is that although we do a lot of work with Erasmus, we cannot influence on the number of quotas that we receive. They always say, we should increase the number of incoming students. And we tell them, one partner receives five quotas for our students to go abroad, and they only receive one for them to come. So sometimes it's not disinterest of European students to come to [anonymous] university, it's the number of quota available. And on the other hand, they don't offer any solution to create a fund, National Fund here (…) (Institution B1).

As a result, this interviewee emphasized their duty to contribute at different levels and outlined a close, consultative role with the national office in the development of the Erasmus strategy. However, at the same time, they encounter obstacles because of the government's demands to boost the number of students, which are hard to fulfill due to quota restrictions and a lack of funding from a national fund.

Lastly, a review of the Chinese responses reveals that five of the six institutions stated that they did not feel pressure from the country's authorities. These interviewees made it clear that national authorities were not pressuring them to raise quantitative targets. One participant (Institution C4) even mentioned that the government was now concentrating on qualitative targets because it believed that the current number of international students was adequate. According to this interviewee, even though national authorities may pressure them to raise the quality, this was in line with their own voluntary efforts and was therefore not a problem. In this context, two interviewees reported feeling guided to focus on quality rather than quantity and quotations that are pertinent to this viewpoint are listed below.

> (…) We don't have that kind of number request for our job, like you must recruit how many students from abroad. We don't have that kind of things, but what we are doing that kind of things is called high quality education in China, in higher education. So, we were asked to build a better campus and to manage better courses and to make our university better. We ask our university as a high qualified university, but we don't have that kind of request to recruit how many foreign students, we don't have that kind of things (Institution C1).

> We are top public university. So, we are strictly under the administration by the government. What our government used to do is to increase the international students coming to China years, maybe years. The government would like to do it better till now, to recent years. But the government think the number of international students is enough. The government said it's enough. So, they want to approve the quality of the international students, so they no more concentrate on the numbers. They want to improve the quality. They might push, but it is for university to be better, so I would like to do it myself. So, it's like pushing, but we would like to do it as well. So, it's okay (Institution C4).

Similar to the interviewees which stated their own voluntary efforts as explained above, another interviewee specified that such efforts were driven by their own motivation, emphasizing that they voluntarily pursued these goals rather than due to the pressure of the Ministry, because they saw them as an opportunity for their institution.

There's actually no pressure. Actually, that's our own motivation. We want to collaborate, you know. So, if the Ministry of Education, they ask us to do or they ask some university presidents or chairman to accompany the ministers. And we are very willing to do this. I think this is an opportunity for the universities, to explore more kind of collaborations with their partners in the visiting country and destinations. So, from our point of view, we are out of our own will and out of our needs to have these international collaborations, not just under the pressure of the Ministry of Education (Institution C4).

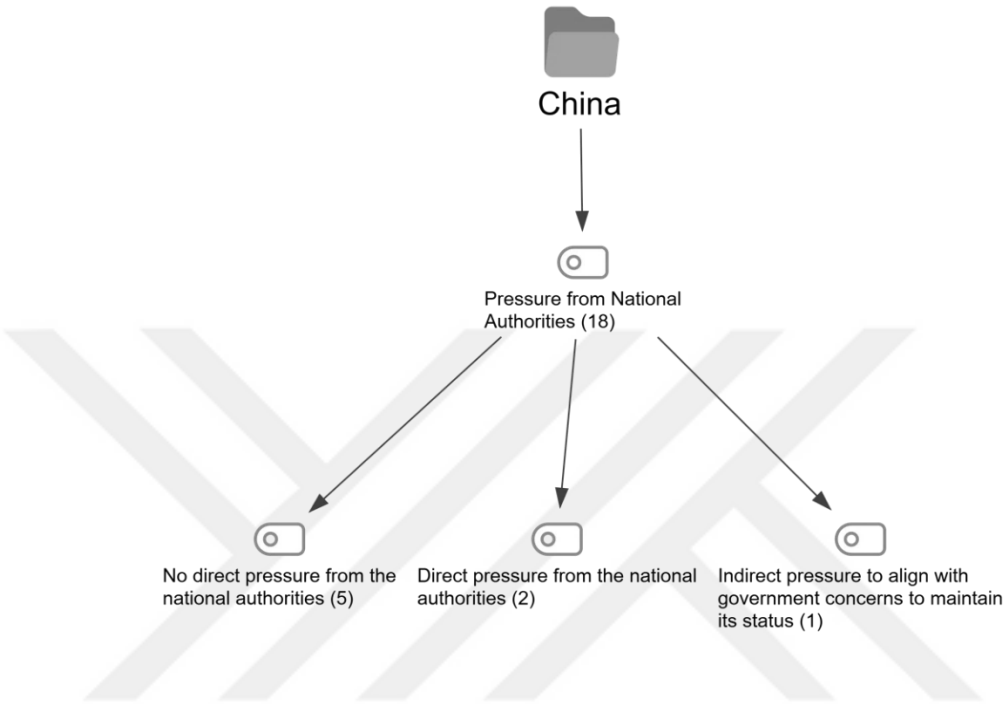


Figure 6.23 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Pressure from National Authorities (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

Furthermore, in their answers, two interviewees emphasized the top-down versus bottom-up dynamics. One interviewee highlighted that internationalization was more of a bottom-up process in their institution, saying that no one can force a university or faculty to participate in an international collaboration if they did not want to. *"Internal affairs are mostly; I think kind of top down. But for the international cooperation, it is mostly bottom up. That means, if the university, or if the faculty, they don't have the interest in working in a cooperation, nobody can push them (Institution C2)".*

The other interviewee acknowledged that the Ministry continues to be the ultimate authority in a top-down capacity and mentioned a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches. On the other hand, it was also highlighted that, at the lowest level, each university had its own consciousness and autonomy.

> Of course, the Ministry of Education is right authority body, and we need to report to them in terms of some policies and whatever. And sometimes we can get some funding from them. So, it's kind of top down. But from bottom, I think each university now, they have this kind of awareness. You know, internationalization is a must way to go (Institution C4).

As an alternative example, one interviewee stated that it was critical to keep positive relations with the government and comprehend their expectations because the government provided 80% of the university's budget. This circumstance was coded and interpreted as an indirect form of pressure. Below is a quote that exemplifies this point.

> First of all, we understand that we have a general guidance, like the policy that we have to follow. And secondly, if you want to stand on top of this pyramid of higher education, and want to maintain your status, and you have to make sure you maintain a good relationship with the government, no matter it is in Türkiye or in China. And you must understand that what kind of policy you are doing to make sure it is not going wrong with the national government. And secondly, because we received more than 80% of our budget from a local government, you have to understand, what is their concern? What do they want you to do? All right? And also, we have some kind of performance evaluation inside the university. So how come you can stand out from the other administrative departments? So, these are all pressure, yes. But no, as long as you work hard enough and also smart enough that if you achieve something, you are helping your university to achieve and to maintain the status as a prestigious university, this is again called competition. But nobody wants, nobody. No one wants to lose the competition because we couldn't afford to do that (Institution C6).

As for the People's Republic of China, notably, five of the six interviewees that said they did not feel pressure from national authorities. The interview data show that the institutions do not feel very much pressure locally, mostly due the size of China and that each of the institutions is located in a different place.

To conclude, the majority of institutions stated that their efforts concerning the EU programs and internationalization were primarily voluntary and that they did not experience direct pressure from national authorities. However, it is also evident that a significant number of institutions report direct pressure from national authorities. The majority of respondents emphasize that this pressure is mainly directed towards raising quantitative metrics. Furthermore, some institutions referred to indirect pressures, such as the impact of international rankings, further emphasizing the nuanced dynamics of institutional responses to external factors. These results show that institutional autonomy, governance frameworks, and particular national and international concerns all influence the relationship between national authorities and international offices.

The table below displays the results and summary of findings related to this sub-theme of "pressure from national authorities" that are most frequently cited.

Table 6.12 Pressure from National Authorities (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Voluntary or pressured?	Both voluntary (2) and direct pressure (2)	Both voluntary (2) and direct pressure (1)	Both voluntary (5) and direct pressure (2), with the first category being more prominent
Pressure for what?	For quantitative targets	For quantitative targets	For qualitative targets
Indirect pressure	International rankings	Not applicable	Aligning with the government concerns to maintain status
Institution-specific issues	Pressure from accreditation agencies	Not appliable	Not applicable

6.3.3 Legal and Institutional Difficulties

As explained in the theoretical framework of the study, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) describe a number of institutional and structural obstacles as part of the difficulties and constraints associated with the policy transfer process. These obstacles could include ideological disparities, institutional and structural incompatibilities, political, bureaucratic, and financial resource limitations, bureaucratic size and effectiveness, technological capabilities, and the intricacy of the policy or program. Similarly, Evans (2009) also defines two types of barriers to policy transfer: environmental and cognitive barriers. Cognitive obstacles, such as restricted search activities or cultural assimilation, are limitations experienced during the pre-decision stage, while environmental barriers include inadequate policy transfer networks, effective mobilization tactics, and resources.

In light of the theoretical framework, the following questions were posed to institutions in this sub-theme: "*What kind of legal and institutional difficulties and/or problems has your organization encountered when implementing EU higher education program policies in practice? If any challenges were encountered, were they overcome? If so, did the solutions originate from within the institution, the EU, or the government?"*

The purpose of these questions was to find out if institutions encountered any difficulties carrying out the EU programs and, if so, how these difficulties were resolved. Additionally, the responses were examined using the framework of policy transfer theory, with an emphasis on how these challenges might affect the process of policy transfer, as previously explained.

A general analysis of the responses reveals that five interviewees cited academic structure misalignments/incompatibilities as the most commonly mentioned challenge. The difficulties that fall under this coding category are mostly related to academic procedures, such as conflicts between academic calendars, incompatibilities between credit and grading systems, variations in academic programs, problems with course recognition, and courses that are offered in different languages. Legal and bureaucratic limitations are another commonly mentioned challenge, and four interviewees have responded to this category. Legal or bureaucratic challenges unique to a given country fall under this category and will be covered in more detail in the country-specific analyses.

Another commonly cited challenge was related to institutional coordination, as highlighted for three institutions. Under this category, participants referred to difficulties such as motivating other units and departments within the institution, getting support from faculties, and fostering collaboration toward internationalization efforts. In addition to these, specific interviewees mentioned a few particular difficulties, including those related perception and culture and accreditation limitations. These particular instances demonstrate the variety of difficulties that institutions encounter when putting EU higher education programs into practice.

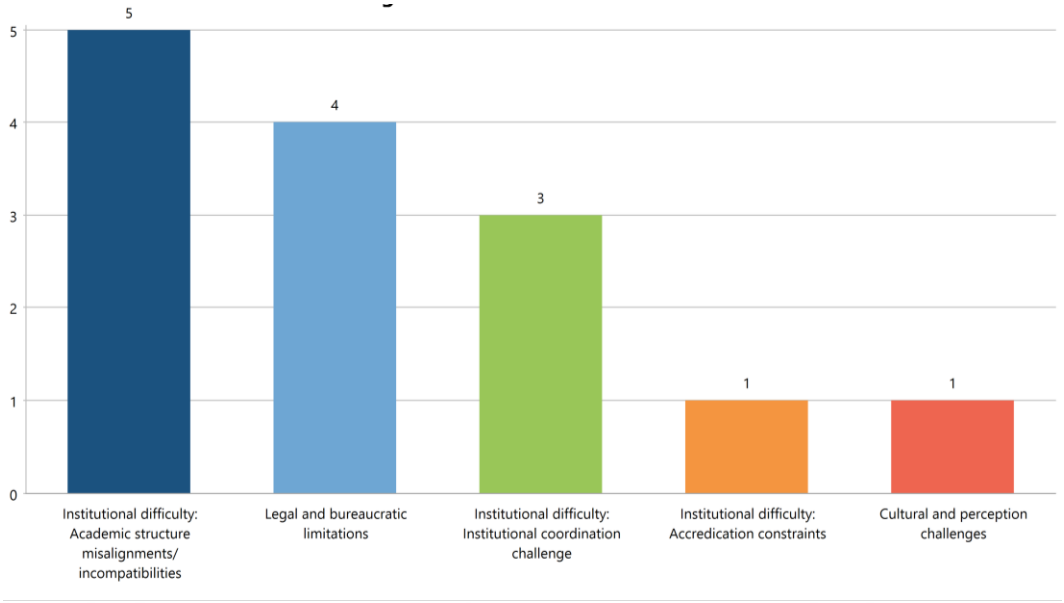


Figure 6.24 Legal and Institutional Difficulties.

Focusing first on the Republic of Kazakhstan in the country-specific analysis, the most often cited challenges were the ones categorized under "institutional difficulties" and "academic structure misalignments/incompatibilities", as two institutions among the four highlighted these difficulties. In that regard, one interviewee noted that differences in grading schemes, ECTS credit distribution, and university-to-university calendar misalignments were major obstacles. Another interviewee, adopting an academic perspective, highlighted key challenges related to differences in academic programs and credit systems. S(he) also emphasized that students often had to take additional courses due to the structure of exchange periods, which created further difficulties. The responses from these interviewees are presented below.

> Sometimes student can have problem when they like going to Europe to study, because in Europe, they don't have some programs, but we just rarely recount the ECTS, or sometimes they just come and take extra course that they missed because of the starting there (Institution K2).

> There are some problems with academic calendar, some universities, and also this credit or grading system when it comes to academic calendar. So, we just decided to offer mobility programs in German universities and Austrian universities and Slovenian universities only for spring semester, and our spring semester starts in January. That's because of this conflict and about credit system. There are some French universities in which courses weigh 2 or 4 ECTS; but our one course weighs 5 ECTS. And we decided that students should combine two courses, even to transfer it as one of course here. And about grading system. If the grading system is high in our partner universities, students need to receive passing grade in our partner university to just to transfer it to Institution K1 (Institution K1).

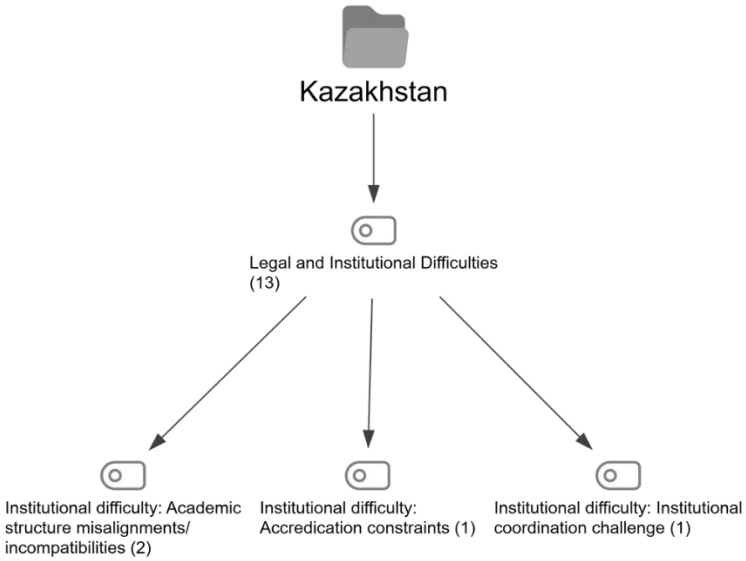


Figure 6.25 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Legal and Institutional Difficulties (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

Furthermore, one interviewee highlighted difficulties resulting from the application of accreditation rules rather than issues with program participants or partner institutions. This interviewee stated their requirement of obeying EU-like standards set by German accreditation agencies, which may be challenging to fully implement. Another interviewee noted the university's narrow academic focus on Islamic studies and brought attention to problems with internal communication and task distribution. Additionally, this participant mentioned that it was difficult to obtain responses from European institutions and that obstacles related to size and status prevented European universities from expressing interest. The quotation of this participation is presented below.

> If it will consume some person's time, then I worry, in that case, it will be a problem. If it (the processes) requires other departments to be involved and they need to write something or then it will be a little bit hard, because I cannot push other departments to do some stuff which is related to our department (…) Being international office here in Kazakhstan and also working in very specific university, it's really hard to implement such programs, honestly, really hard, because I tried to contact many European universities, and I didn't get any answer. Our head of university, he visited Germany, and he visited many theological departments, but later to sign an agreement, it's really hard (…) I've tried so many times to contact them, but I know how it works. It's not like sending them email, you need to go there, fly there, and just have meeting with them. So that's one of the hardest parts, I guess. Just to meet with them and agree with them, because many universities, they are huge universities, like their one department is our one university. So, they are not really interested to work with us, because they will say, you are very small, so and also

> private, and we are interested in public, big universities to implement these programs, because they also need a status, right? That's the problem for us (Institution K4).

Respondents from Kazakhstan did not mention any legal difficulties and one interviewee even stated that *"I'm working here for six years I did not see any problems from legal part, but maybe it was in the beginning of realization of such programs, but I'm not sure (Institution K1)"*.

Similar to Kazakhstan, the responses from Bosnia and Herzegovina reveal that the most commonly reported difficulties fell under the heading of "institutional difficulties: academic structure misalignments," with two institutions stating these challenges. The most frequently expressed concern was recognition, specifically with regard to student and staff academic accomplishments, which may cause delays or even necessitate retaking courses. Another academic challenge was found to be courses taught in foreign languages. Pertinent quotes highlighting these difficulties are presented below.

> Limiting factor for mobility in EU programs are course offer in foreign languages, and potentially recognition of achieved results (Institution B3).

> It was the recognition of results. For instance, we still don't have any recognition mechanism for staff, but it's everywhere across Europe, so I'm not that worried. But I think the major problem when it comes to EU program was direct recognition, where many students were just said no, and they couldn't recognize, and they had to repeat the year (…) (Institution B1).

In contrast to Kazakhstan, legal difficulties were also reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with two respondents providing answers that were classified as "legal and bureaucratic limitations." As presented in the quotation below, the country's complicated political system, which has multi-layers of power, presented one difficulty, and added to the burden of compliance for international programs.

> It is not because the programs are bad or we did something bad, but because Bosnia and Herzegovina has a very complex political structure, because we have four levels of authority (…) all the international resolutions and international programs are actually inferior to the law of Bosnia Herzegovina, which means that in the case of Bosnian legislation and the Erasmus, we have to comply with Erasmus (Institution B2)

Further complicating legal issues was mentioned as the country's non-EU status and, as a result, its designation as a partner country. For example, one participant expressed that even though the EU budget and procurement regulations were not implemented

domestically, institutions must follow them which lead to regulatory incompatibilities that made project execution more difficult. Processes involving digital signatures are another illustration of legal and administrative difficulties. In order to guarantee document compliance, alternative solutions like embassy validations are required because the incompatibility with digital signature systems makes it difficult to participate in programs like Erasmus Without Paper. The relevant responses from the institutions regarding the mentioned legal and bureaucratic challenges are given below.

> Other than that, I think it was the problem because we are not EU and we receive EU money, EU budget, and EU budget must be spent according to the EU regulations, which are not applicable here. So, this was also a problem in many project capacity building projects when we would purchase some equipment. So, you have to follow all these regulations which are not the same here (…) One of the problems is that we don't have a digital signature as legally recognized here and now, Erasmus partners, they all insist on Erasmus without paper and signing documents [digitally]. So, this is also something which is problematic for us, or international students, because they need to regulate their residence permit here. They bring documents printed with digital signatures. They are not accepted here, but we found a solution. Actually, on the staff week, we introduced a session called Erasmus gone wrong, where we invite all these Erasmus coordinators, and then we discuss all the problems that we have. In one of those sessions, we found a solution for that problem. So, when a student come from the country and bring the document with the digital signature, they can go to the Embassy in Sarajevo, and they can sign and stamp which is accepted here. But another problem was, what if the embassy is not in in the Sarajevo, but in some other country, for instance, Portugal, they have to go to Budapest or sometimes to Belgrade, but it is expensive to go and everything. Then we found out that every EU embassy that you have, they can do sign, because this is the role of European Union, they can sign for every country.

The above example stands out as a critical example of the difficulties experienced in internationalization and the EU programs, where the solution comes directly from the international office itself. In this sense, instead of waiting for a solution from institutional or national authorities, finding solutions directly from the bottom is important to underline.

Lastly, for the Chinese institutions, two of them referred to the issues which fall under the category of institutional difficulties, while two other interviewees mentioned bureaucratic and legal limitations. In terms of the institutional challenges, two interviewees pointed to difficulties in interdepartmental support, task distribution, and internal communication. Below are some examples of participant responses that address these issues.

> The difficulty is that not every college supports this project. So, it depends on the personal relationship with those colleges and with those faculties (Institution C1).

> I think for institutional difficulties, of course, not only international office (is included). Because if we have to be part of this program, teaching affairs office and probably graduate school, student affairs office, all these relevant offices, they need to improve their kind of work, how to better facilitate this program and institution (Institution C5).

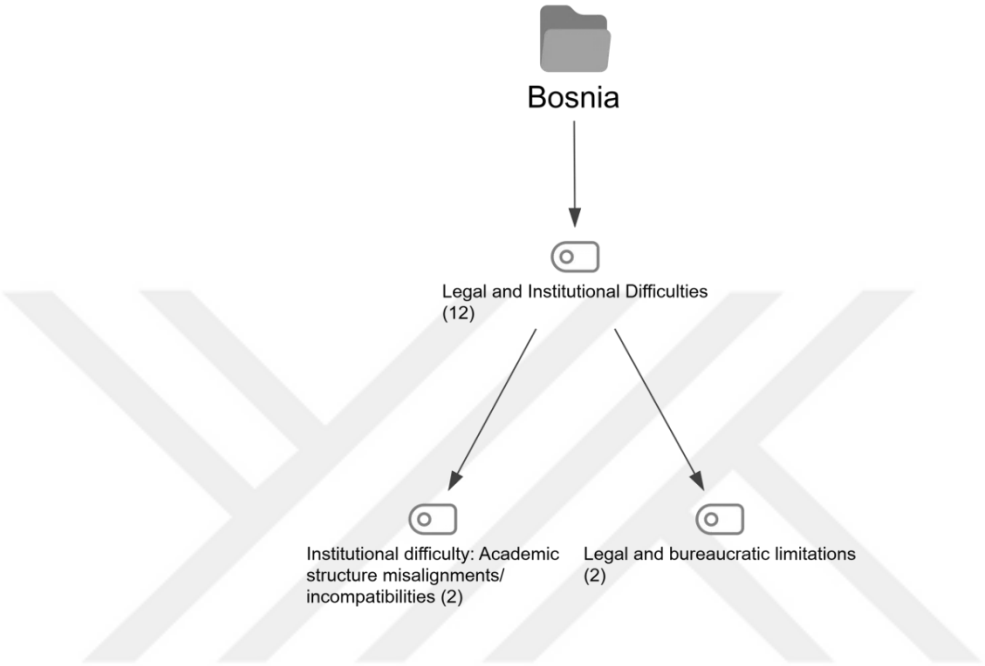


Figure 6.26 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Legal and Institutional Difficulties (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Legal and bureaucratic constraints were the second most commonly mentioned theme, and this topic stimulated unique and critical reactions. One interviewee highlighted the EU-imposed obstacles, pointing out the detrimental consequences of the pandemic and the constrictive influence of the EU-China relations on forming partnerships. Below are quotes from this interviewee.

> The only problem came from EU side. For example, when we established a [anonymous] project, we have [anonymous] network, right? And we can't use the Sino EU leader network, because if there's something concerned with EU-China, there will be problems from the EU side. That's a barrier we discussed during our meeting in the past years, actually, especially after the pandemic, we got some problems in developing EU project and in running. From my point of view, in some universities in China, they also have the same problem. They can do only by institutional cooperation, but they cannot do, as in the past. They always formed a kind of national level or international between the EU and China, a kind of network or association or something. It was a national level one or national wide one. [Now] it is hard (Institution C2).

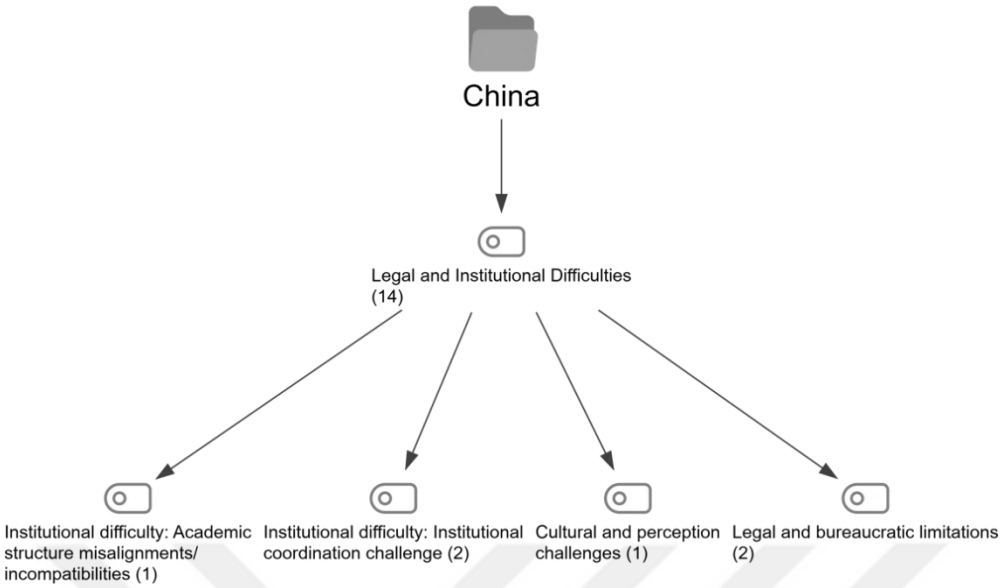


Figure 6.27 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Legal and Institutional Difficulties (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

According to the participant's response below, another interviewee emphasized the challenge of adhering to both the EU and national regulations in Europe. For them, it seems confusing and challenging to manage compliance across several member states and institutions due to the complexity of EU regulations, which demand obedience to both national and EU-wide laws.

> (…) The EU itself is a cluster. So apart from abiding by the rule of EU as a general, we need to observe the rules of the country and the university we are working with. Because we're not dealing with one country, dealing with multiple countries. On top of this, multiple countries, you have a general, I mean commander, which is called as the EU (…) And every single country in Europe, has its own legislation. And then sometimes, every single university has its own charter we need to abide by it. So, these are very much creating confusions if we need to work with one additional partner in terms of Erasmus Plus. You abide by the rule of Portugal, Spain, Italy and that each of them has a history (…) they have their own policy. You have to respect. This, to me, is the most difficult part (Institution C6).

Moreover, one interviewee mentioned recognition issues in individual responses, which is consistent with findings in the other two countries. Another interviewee emphasized difficulty arising from misconceptions and misinterpretations of China's image, a problem further explained in the response given below.

> Right now, the most difficult problem to handle is the misunderstanding from the whole world to China. That's the most difficult thing. When we went to other countries and we tell them, China is very nice, good. But for their impression, they think from their media, but fortunately, right now we have Tiktok. When the young people, they see China in TikTok, they know it's totally different, right? Some of the misunderstandings are not caused by Chinese, caused by the fake news from Westerners. So, right now we are trying to open door to the whole world and led the whole world to know the real China. So, China is not that kind of a centralized country and lack of freedom. If you come to China, then you know what is the fact? What are the real things happening in China? So, that's what we are. We are mentioned about, and we just really care about that and, but we still really have an open mandate to the whole world. We want the whole world to come to visit us, and we really want to build a change, and we really want to build the relationship with other countries and to connect with others (Institution C1).

Last but not least, one interviewee specifically declared that it had not faced any challenges, which is also included as an intriguing and distinctive viewpoint: *"For China, for the Chinese program, it's easy. We just apply it (international programs), and we get it. It's easy. So, we don't have that kind of problem in China. Chinese government, any problem in any program (Institution C4)."*

To conclude, Republic of Kazakhstan highlighted challenges related to academic misalignments and inter-institutional communication and support, without mentioning any legal or bureaucratic difficulties.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, similarly noted academic misalignments but also addressed legal and bureaucratic challenges, including the country's complex governance structure.

In People's Republic of China, participants raised issues similar to the other two countries, such as academic misalignments and inter-institutional communication problems. However, unlike the others, Chinese respondents also emphasized topics like China-EU relations and China's international image, also reflecting a focus on socio-political issues rather than purely institutional and technical challenges.

The most often cited results and summary of findings associated with this sub-theme of "legal and institutional difficulties" are shown in the table below.

Table 6.13 Legal and Institutional Difficulties (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Academic structure misalignments	-Clash in academic calendars -Credit and grading system variances -Difference in academic programs	-Recognition of results -Courses offered in foreign languages	-Recognition
Institutional coordination challenges	-Inter institutional contact, support, and job division	Not applicable	-Inter institutional contact, support, and job division
Legal and bureaucratic limitations	Not applicable	-Complex political structure -Being a partner country -Requirement of budgetary use according to the EU regulations -Digital signature	-Barriers from the EU side -Difficulty in forming networks due to EU-China relations -Pandemic
Institution-specific challenges	Accreditation constraints	Not applicable	Cultural and perception challenges

6.4 Adaptation, Resistance and Support on Institutional and National Level

This last theme encompasses analyses at multiple levels, incorporating both institutional and national levels. At the institutional level, it first attempts to comprehend the reasons and motives behind the transfer of EU programs, rules, and regulations. This is closely tied to the question Dolowitz and Marsh developed regarding "why do actors engage in policy transfer." The reasons behind actors' decision to participate in EU programs show how perceived benefits or alignment with institutional objectives may influence their decision. Additionally, the institutional level analysis of the sub-theme "change in policy adaptation" aims to determine whether the interviewed institutions made any institutional changes to implement EU programs and how they might selectively modify policies to suit local contexts.

This theme also examines how different actors' resistance and institutional support affect the extent and character of this transfer process at the institutional level. This is an attempt to ascertain whether or not inter-institutional actors—students, faculty, and administrative staff—accept or oppose program adaptation, which also reflects the multi-layered adaptation process. This analysis has a lot to do with the Europeanization framework, particularly with regard to the mediating factor of multiple veto points that can either help or impede domestic change. Faculty members in particular may occasionally serve as veto points to oppose rules and procedures pertaining to EU higher education programs. Furthermore, it is crucial to ascertain whether these actors accept and view the EU-induced programs, rules, and regulations as legitimate or as completely distinct from the pre-existing institutional and cultural structures, as viewed from the sociological institutionalist stance of the Europeanization framework and social learning perspective.

From a national level analysis on the other hand, this theme examines the nature of relationships between international offices in the same country, focusing horizontal policy learning among these actors. Moreover, the analysis explores whether international relations offices can influence national decisions or initiate practices through cooperation from bottom.

6.4.1 Motivations for Participation

One of the main components of the policy transfer framework developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) is understanding *why actors engage in policy transfer*. Although this question is frequently examined from a spectrum that includes both voluntary and coercive drives, the goal of this sub-theme goes beyond this continuum. As an alternative, it aims to answer a more basic query: what motivates institutions to participate in the EU programs and to transfer its policies? To explore this, participants were asked the following question: *"Could you please explain the motivations behind your institution's involvement in EU higher education programs?"* Hence, the goal of this investigation is to identify the various motivations—financial, cultural, social, or

political—that motivate institutions to take part in EU higher education initiatives and to examine these elements within the larger framework of dynamics of policy transfer.

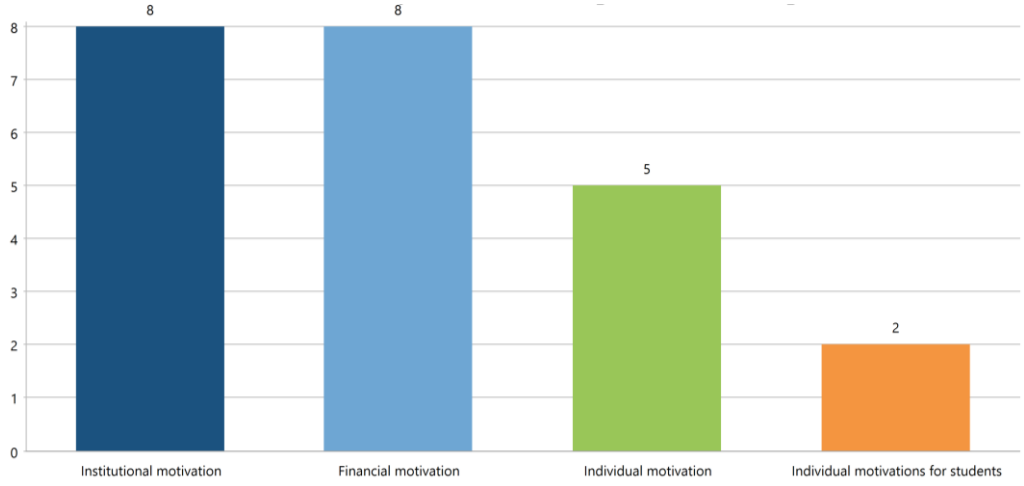


Figure 6.28 Motivations of Participations in the EU Higher Education Programs.

At the beginning of the interviews, one could expect that the most commonly cited reason for institutional participation would be financial motivation, specifically referring to the scholarships offered by the EU programs. Since eight out of 13 institutions cited financial incentives as their main reason for participating in EU programs, this expectation was mainly fulfilled. However, the focus on institutional motivations, which were also mentioned for eight institutions, was equally prominent, although it was somehow unexpected in terms of its prevalence across all countries. Goals like sharing best practices and experiences, improving the educational system, encouraging diversity, promoting internationalization, raising the institution's profile and visibility and improving quality were all included in the institutional motivations.

Individual motivation was another commonly stated motivation, almost as prevalent as institutional and financial drivers. Benefits for program participants, especially students, fell under this category. These included chances to travel to other countries, develop communication and educational skills, increase employability, promote cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, and broaden personal and professional networks.

Examining responses from individual countries, firstly those from the institutions of Republic of Kazakhstan reveals that the comparatively even distribution of motivations observed in the general responses also exists here. For the three primary motivational categories—financial, individual, and institutional—two interviewees referred to each.

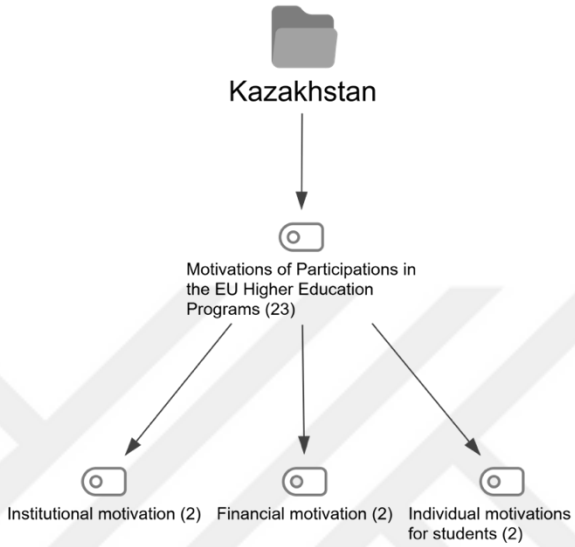


Figure 6.29 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Motivations for Participations in the EU Higher Education Programs (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

Under the institutional motivation category, specific goals including improving the educational system, increasing diversity and the number of incoming students, sharing best practices and experience, and improving systems were highlighted. Moreover, as it could be seen in the quotations below, the responses from Kazakhstan highlight that within the institutional motivation category, there is a notable perspective of viewing the European higher education system and its institutions as advanced models to emulate and as benchmarks for improving domestic systems.

> It [EU program] will help us to advance our educational system, to understand more this European credit transfer system, and also, of course, it's for diversity. The Erasmus program helps us to increase the incoming rate of students. And also, of course, it is about quality that many European universities are interested in partnering with [anonymous] University. And also, it is for advertising, as I told you before for enrollment (Institution K1).

> (…) European education is one of the most relevant trends, and then the best education. So far in as the developing country, we would like to get the best practices that they have and, apply it as the university or even as the country in the strategy. So, and we believe that their experience will help us to improve our, you know, like, some withdraws within our system (Institution K3).

In a similar vein, two interviewees underlined financial motivations, highlighting the significance and vital role of the funds supplied by the EU programs. Furthermore, two interviewees mentioned individual motivations, emphasizing the advantages for students, including improving their communication and academic abilities, increasing their employability, and giving them the chance to travel to other countries. Pertinent quotes are included below for additional context.

> It's to prepare students to high quality, with good education skills. Also, it has impact on communication skills. One of the main goals of university is to prepare students to the job, to give them not only theoretical knowledge, but also practical knowledge. Government does this program as well, because they want to prepare good quality students, with quality specialists in the future (Institution K2).

> (…) It will be good opportunity for students to explore another country, to develop themselves, networking, bring their like knowledge and so on (…) not only for students, but for staff to interact with other partner or other universities. So, it's also great opportunity for them to expand their knowledge, to interact, share with their experience (Institution K4).

On the other hand, an analysis of the responses from Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that three interviewees mentioned financial motivation, two interviewees mentioned institutional motivation, and one interviewee mentioned individual motivation. Financial motivation was unanimously stated for all institutions as the most common and essential reason for taking part in the EU programs. Below is one of the most thorough answers that emphasizes the vital need for funding.

> We use them [EU funding] as a means to improve a situation at the university, because otherwise we would have to use our own money, which we don't get enough from the government. So, we always use it as something that as an additional source. For example, we have a student dormitory called Antalya. Why? Because the city of Antalya invested money for us to have a student dormitory. Our civil engineering faculty are constructed thanks to TİKA. We have to find ways to figure out how to get money for infrastructure, for things that need to be done, something that is normal. And for you, and you don't have to think about where the money comes from, but for us, we have to, because we come from the country where everything is not so good standing, and so you have to find a way how to get that extra money you need for certain stuff. And the EU funds, as well as every fund, is actually a good source of extra money that you need (Institution B2).

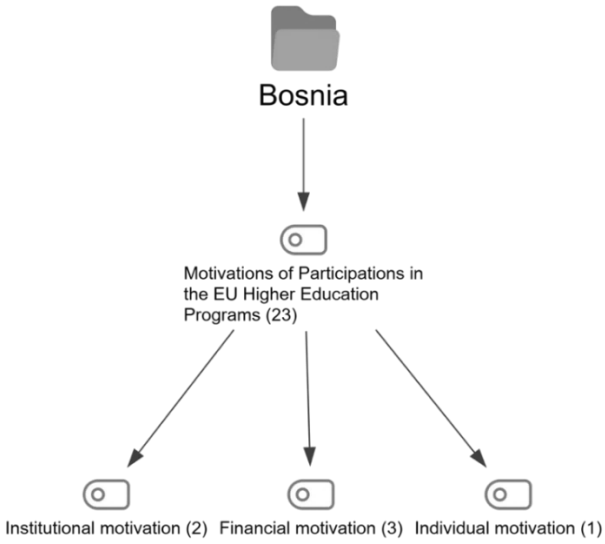


Figure 6.30 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Motivations for Participations in the EU Higher Education Programs (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

From a different vein, in terms of institutional motivation, institutions prioritized objectives like promoting the institution, increasing visibility, and aiding in internationalization, which is consistent with trends seen in other countries. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the EU programs were seen as instruments for assisting in the post-war rebuilding of universities, a country-specific element also surfaced. The response provided below reflects the most comprehensive perspective on this matter, while also containing upsetting elements.

> Actually, after the war, the university was very much destroyed, and many personnel were actually killed or left the country, so we needed some kind of funds to rebuild the university and train the new personnel and so on. In this case, the EU funded programs at that time, it was Tempus and CARDS who actually helped in rebuilding the university. We saw that this was also a promotion of the University of [anonymous] to the international area. Transfer of know-how and how to be very important to us, and also networking, because it is very hard to be university just for yourself, without any contact outside. And Erasmus actually helped us, and it actually provided us quicker communication between universities as well, to meet each other, to go into projects and so on (Institution B1).

For the People's Republic of China, data reveals that four interviewees cited institutional motivations, while individual motivations are also mentioned for four institutions as the most common answers. Common objectives under the category of institutional motivation include improving the quality of higher education,

improvement of internationalization, and learning from other institutions—reactions that are in line with those from other nations. Notably however, as a specific answer, one interviewee stressed the importance of rebuilding ties with European allies following the pandemic and this is covered in the following statements.

> We really want to have more collaboration with EU universities and institutions, but the current situation, probably because of the COVID, I think it turns out becoming more difficult for us to have to resume normal contacts with EU partners and the situation is changing as well. So, we really look forward to having more contacts if possible (Institution C5).

Hence, it is also noteworthy that, despite not being specifically discussed in the study, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have had a significant impact on the dynamics of higher education in China, as indicated by the participants' mentions of its effects.

Within the individual motivation category on the other hand, goals such as peer-to-peer learning, fostering dialogue, building international networks, advancing field-specific knowledge, promoting mutual cultural understanding, and equipping students with a global perspective were highlighted, as reflected in the illustrative quotes provided.

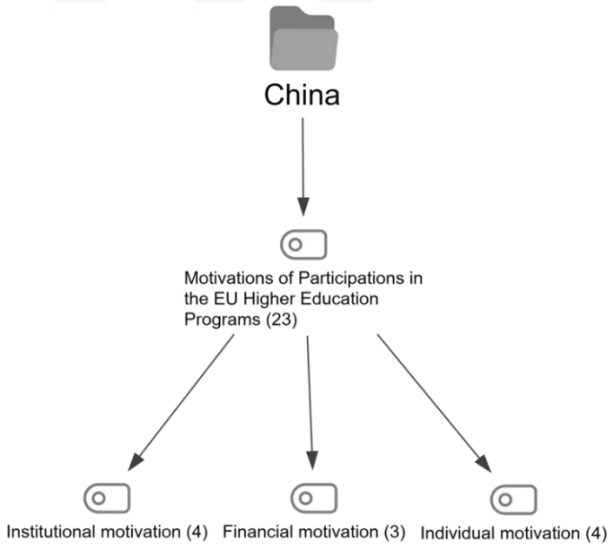


Figure 6.31 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Motivations for Participations in the EU Higher Education Programs (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

> (…) I think mainly we want to equip our students with kind of globalized vision and to be global competitors, through this kind of mobility program (…) I think it's very important for young people to have mutual cultural understanding among each other (Institution C5).
>
> We can also help to improve the mobility and experience of the Chinese students, because through programs like Erasmus, our students have the chance to attend this prestigious program (Institution C6)

In order to promote internationalization, China, the second-largest economy in the world, makes significant investments in education and higher education, as described in the chapter on country backgrounds. It also provides its own scholarship programs to support its outward internationalization strategy. Hence, compared to participants from the other two countries, it was anticipated that Chinese participants would place less emphasis on financial motivations. Nevertheless, three out of six institutions, or half of the respondents, stated that financial support was a factor in their institution's decision to participate in or consider taking part in the EU programs.

Lastly, noteworthy and particular explanation fits into the coding category, which is generally understood to include political and sociocultural motivation. This category focused on the notion that involvement in the EU programs could help to improve and reshape China's image in the EU's eyes, as the statement below demonstrates.

> It's about the cultural exchange, and I think it's very important, especially for China. We have a different view of the democracy. And actually, people always think that China is centralized, they don't have democracy. But actually, that's wrong. We do have democracy We have the right to vote, and we have the right to decide who is going to be our dean and who is going to be the leader, we have that kind of right. But our EU partners, they may think that China is kind of mystery, or kind of old fashioned or things like that, but after coming to here, they know that. They think that Communist Party is just a centralized, but actually not. The Communist Party also have the democracy. Why? Why don't we have that kind of democracy? We also have that so. So that's kind of cultural exchange (Institution C1).

This response was accompanied by at least two interviewees highlighting reasons that are representative of broader China-EU relations, such as improving China's standing with the EU, reestablishing ties with European institutions, and forming partnerships with European countries. Particularly in the context of higher education, these answers highlight more general aspects of China-EU relations.

To conclude, according to the analysis, there are many different reasons why institutions participate in the EU higher education programs, but the most common

ones in all three countries are financial, institutional, and individual factors. Eight out of 13 institutions cited financial motivation, highlighting the vital role that EU-provided funding and scholarships play in facilitating institutional engagement. Eight institutions mentioned institutional motivation, which was equally important. This category included objectives that reflect broader aspirations for systemic improvement, such as promoting internationalization, exchanging best practices, enhancing educational quality, and increasing institutional visibility. Individual motivation was also extensively underlined, through emphasizing advantages like improving students' communication and academic abilities, boosting employability, and fostering cross-cultural interactions.

Responses from different countries showed subtle differences in motivating factors. Financial, institutional, and individual incentives were distributed fairly in Kazakhstan, with institutions especially appreciating the EU higher education system as a template for improving domestic procedures. Financial motivation is the most prominent response in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with also a focus on institutional motivations related to post-war reconstruction. Chinese institutions, on the other hand, paid attention to institutional and individual motivations, particularly to fostering mutual cultural understanding, repairing ties with European partners after the pandemic, and enhancing China-EU relations. Financial motivations were still important for half of the respondents, despite China's strong investment in higher education and its own scholarship programs.

I expected participants to highlight financial motivation and the anticipated contribution of the EU programs to post-war reconstruction, given Bosnia's circumstances and the limited budget allocated to education. In a similar vein, it was not surprising that institutions in Kazakhstan, a country attempting to distance itself from Soviet influence, expressed institutional efforts to improve educational quality, encourage internationalization, and see the EU as a model for these processes. But in the case of China, one of the biggest economies in the world, which is well-known for its outward-focused internationalization strategy, its own scholarship programs, and its large investments in higher education, I did not anticipate that financial motivations would be brought up as one of factors. This shows how crucial the EU support is even

in well-funded national systems. These results show how institutional and national contexts influence the reasons behind policy transfer.

The table below displays the results and summary of findings related to this sub-theme of "motivations of participation" that are most frequently cited.

Table 6.14 Motivations of Participation (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Institutional Motivations	-Advance in education system, diversity and incoming student rate -Learning best practices, experience sharing	-Rebuilding university after the war -Visibility and promotion -Transfer of know-how -Networking -Advancement of internationalization	-Learning from other institutions -Quality improvement -Rebuilding relations with EU partners after the pandemic -Connected with EU partners -Advancement of internationalization
Individual Motivations	-Preparing students with good education and communication skills -Exploring another country	Cultural interaction	-Peer to peer learning, dialogue, -International network -Equipping students with globalized vision -Mutual cultural understanding -Chance to attend prestigious programs
Financial Motivations	Funding, financial support & scholarships	Funding, financial support & scholarships	Funding, financial support & scholarships
Institution-specific challenges	Not applicable	Not applicable	-Improvement of image of China from the eyes of the EU -Barriers from the EU side -Difficulty in forming networks due to EU-China relations -Pandemic

6.4.2 Changes and Policy Adaptation

Given that the theme is titled "Adaptation, Resistance, and Support on Institutional and National Levels," one of the main sub-themes examined under this heading is the degree to which institutions directly adapt or filter EU program rules and practices locally and institutionally. In this regard, this part of the study aims to understand if there are any institutional changes or structural updates that these countries and institutions have made due to their inclusion in the EU higher education programs, or can they directly adapt the related rules, regulations and implementations while preserving the existing structure and practices? To investigate this, the following questions were posed during the interviews: *"How do you implement/execute the EU higher education programs? In what ways have these policies been modified to suit your institution's particular domestic context? Can you provide examples of how these programs are adapted to fit your domestic and institutional context?"*

It is reasonable to assume that non-member states, each with distinct country-specific factors, will unavoidably engage in local and institutional adaptations, since even EU member states show considerable variation in how they implement and execute such programs. This is also in line with the policy transfer framework which highlights that domestic context and the need to adapt external policies to local needs frequently determine the extent of transfer.

When the responses are considered in general, it is possible to see that the most frequently expressed answer is "curriculum and structural adjustments"; including topics such as arrangements related to academic programs such as the presence of equivalent courses, postponement of some compulsory courses until after the exchange program, differences between the durations of study levels, dual degree programs, regulations regarding recognition, and adjustments in courses offered in English. Since even within the European Higher Education Area there are differences in academic programs of higher education institutions, durations of study levels, course credits, course contents, and differences in the number of courses offered in English, it is an answer that could be expected that higher education institutions in

non-EU countries would have to make arrangements in order to implement the EU programs.

The second most frequently expressed answer was “no need for big change/compliance in credit system”, and all of these answers came from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of Kazakhstan. Bosnia and Herzegovina were included in the Tempus program in 1996, the Bologna process in 2003, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Degrees in 2007, and the Erasmus+ ICM program since 2014; Republic of Kazakhstan was included in the Tempus program in 1994, the Bologna process in 2010, Erasmus in 2007 and the Erasmus+ ICM program since 2014. Therefore, it is expected that the adaptation process in these two countries, which have been included in these programs for a long time, will be older and more comprehensive. It is understandable that they are already compatible with the European credit systems as a result of this adaptation process since the 1990s. People’s Republic China, on the other hand, is not included in Bologna and the European Higher Education Area but has been participating in the Erasmus programs since the second half of the 2000s starting with a particular China Window within the first period of Erasmus Mundus Program (2005-2008) and being part of the Erasmus+ ICM program since 2014; therefore, its inclusion is more recent and limited compared to other countries.

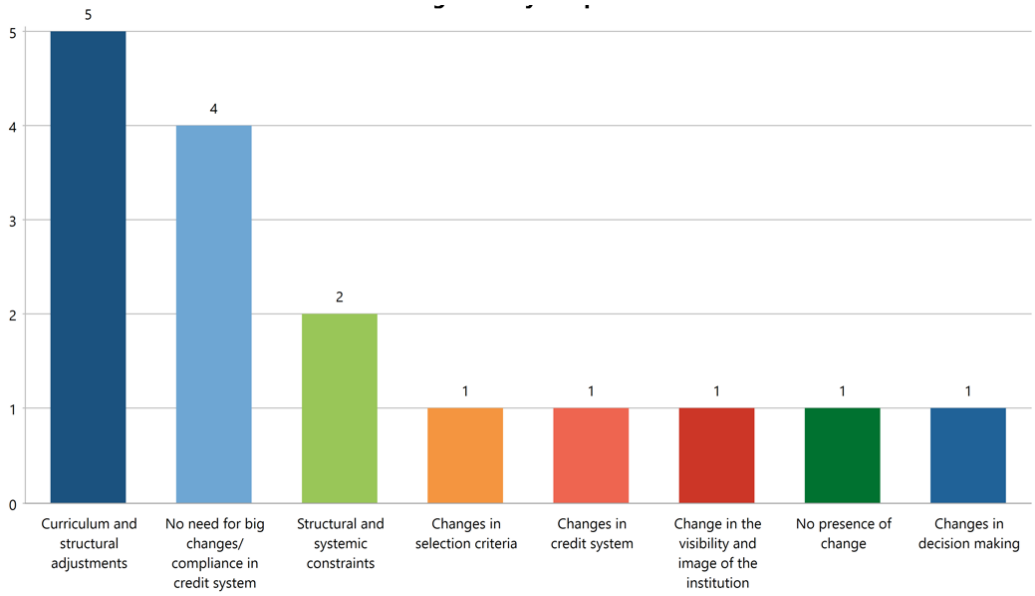


Figure 6.32 Changes-Policy Adaptation.

The third most frequently expressed response is the “structural and systemic constraints” and both interviewees that gave this answer are Chinese institutions, and as will be explained in more detail in the following sections, they drew attention to the differences in the European and Chinese education systems and this structural difficulty with this answer. Apart from these, there are specific and institution-specific answers given in the form of “changes in selection criteria, changes in credit system, change in the visibility and image of the institution, changes in decision making”.

When we examine the responses on a country basis and first look at the Republic of Kazakhstan, it is seen that one of the most frequently expressed responses is the “curriculum and structural adjustments” and was expressed for two out of four institutions. One of these interviewees mentioned that every country and every university was different and therefore a full and one-to-one application was not possible and that they tried to continue with the application that was most suitable for them. This interviewee also mentioned adjustments such as differences in the duration of education levels, compatibility of compulsory courses with the curricula of European institutions, and postponement of some courses to later periods, and the statements of this institution are given below.

> It's not like in fully applying all that, right? Because every country, every university, they are different. And we tried to get the best which will be suits to us (…) Sometimes it's difficult because in some European countries, the bachelor status is just three years and in Kazakhstan it is four years. And sometimes the implementation is a bit difficult. But so far, we're just looking for the curriculum, and then trying to find the best program that would be suitable to our program. And then we are trying to execute them. (…) We need to do some modifications. For example, if we did dual degree program, development of our program takes a lot of time. And then you are looking for the curriculum. Kazakhstani curriculum is made not only by the university, but we also have some regulations to make curriculum. For example, we have some obligatory courses.
>
> No whether you're studying computer science or medicine, you need to take some mandatory courses like history of Kazakhstan. I am trying to send second year student for the exchange semester, and he or she has courses, like I mentioned. And of course, they do not match with the curriculum that European University is proposing for the exchange students. So, therefore, we find that difficulties, but we always try to solve them within the university, because we say that this is the exchange student and then we need to allow, we have to make sure that all the things will be done to make all the comfortable way to that journey. We just like postpone some courses to next semester, or we allow them to take online some courses (Institution K3).

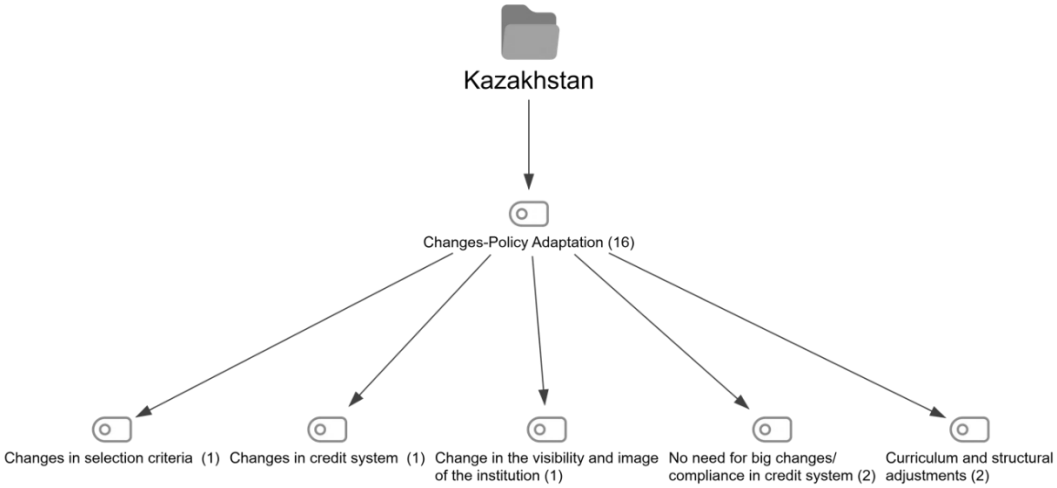


Figure 6.33 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Changes and Policy Adaptation (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

Another interviewee that gave an answer under this sub-theme drew attention to a structural improvement (establishment of double degree program) that took place after the Erasmus program, but it is understood that this situation is not an arrangement that needs to be made to implement the EU programs, but a structural advance that can be realized with the help of these programs. As can be seen in the quotation below, for this institution it was also stated that its institutional image and visibility increased thanks to the Erasmus program, but as stated before, this situation can be seen as a progress and improvement with the help of the program, not a change made to implement the program.

> Erasmus started in 2013. We get double degree programs because of Erasmus. Through these connections, people know about us. It's like your image, image of university. And people after [Erasmus] they knew us, when they visited us, when they saw the university. They communicate with other universities. And, of course, they now knew about us, and it's easier to do some other programs, like big programs, too (Institution K2).

One of the other interviewees in the Republic of Kazakhstan drew attention to the changes and innovations they made in the selection criteria and credit system. As it can be seen in the quotation below, this respondent explained that the institution was included in the Erasmus program in 2009 and that the innovation in the credit system took place in 2013, and therefore the new regulation in the credit system was a

regulation for the implementation of the program after their inclusion in the Erasmus programs.

> We made changes in selection program policies. We added the priority selection for vulnerable groups of students (…) We added this credit system, European credit transfer system, to our system, just to help our incoming students to understand which course with how many ECTS credits. We used this North American system, and we are using our main credit system here. So, one course with 3 US credits, and we just added this to our catalog that at the same time, the same course with 5 ECTS credit section. If I'm not mistaken, students started to study the exchange program with Erasmus in 2009 and ECTS was established in 2013 [so the credit system was developed after the initiation of Erasmus programs in the institution] (Institution K1).

Lastly, two interviewees from the Republic of Kazakhstan mentioned that there was no need for big changes due the already established compliance in credit systems, particularly. As mentioned above, Kazakhstan was included in the Tempus program in the 1990s and more importantly, since it has been a part of the Bologna process since 2010, it seems to have organized its credit system within the scope of Bologna practices, according to the statements of the participants. In this context, as can be seen in the statements below, the participants also stated that they were a part of the Bologna process, they used the same ECTS credits, therefore, they did not need to make any changes in their credit systems to implement the Erasmus programs.

When the responses from the institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are examined, it is seen that two out of three institutions gave the answer of “no need for big changes due to already established compliance in credit system”. As can be seen in the statement below, one of these interviewees gave a response that could be called reactionary, questioning why there was always a need for change when it came to EU programs and stating that they did not change themselves for "them" and that they only used the program in a way that suited them. For this institution, the EU mobility programs are incorporated within existing frameworks without additional structural adjustments, as they view these programs as supplementary to their international activities rather than drivers for institutional change.

> What changes? Why do you think that change is always involved if you use EU program? If you go to mobility, same principles and activities are done in any mobility program, even national scholarship program, as in EU Erasmus program. We do not do changes; we just apply program with the partners. We use Erasmus KA1 and CEEPUS program as mobility programs, are just part of our international activities. Even the number of mobilities through both these programs for students are lesser than, for example, mobility with Chinese universities. We cooperate with

> everyone, and EU programs are tools intended to support cooperation and mobility and exchange of experiences, culture, best practices etc. That is how we see and use them. We do not change ourselves for them, we just use them in a way and in the scope available for us. (Institution B3).

Another interviewee stated that they fully implemented the ECTS credit system and Bologna reforms, as in the institutions in Kazakhstan, and therefore did not feel the need for any changes. *"We have ECTS system. don't have problems with that. We are fully implementing Bologna reforms. So, we don't have any problems with that. Bologna is fully in power here (Institution B2)."*

However, the fact that these institutions have updated their credit systems together with the Bologna process can actually be interpreted as an effect of European programs causing changes on the institutions. As explained in the previous chapters Bologna Process (1999) was initially established as an inter-governmental attempt and the EU formally joined the Bologna Process in 2001. Nonetheless, the European Commission joined the initiative in the following years, and some of its initiatives, such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), began to play a significant role in the EU's higher education processes process. For this reason, the changes made by the institutions in Kazakhstan and Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the Bologna process can also be considered as changes made within the scope of EU programs.

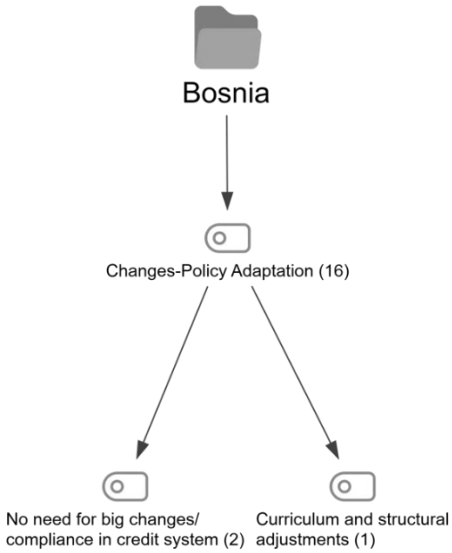


Figure 6.34 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Changes and Policy Adaptation (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Unlike the other two interviewees that stated that there were no changes, another interviewee in Bosnia and Herzegovina mentioned that they made curricular and structural adjustments such as the registration process of exchange students, the creation of guidelines for mobility processes and the obligation to recognize courses taken during the exchange periods. Relevant statement of mentioned participation is given below.

> (…) We made changes, for instance, that enrollment of exchange students. Short term students are enrolled as local students as well, so they can get the transcript of records and so on. One of the changes which was very good was the introduction of a rule book of mobility, which explains the mobility from its beginning, applying and documents until the recognition. And recognition was a problem because students returning with the past exams, some professors didn't want to recognize. Now we have this rule book, which is adopted on the on the Senate, and which says that everything must be recognized it (…) And I think with this rule book, we managed to do this and a lot of other rule books on international projects and copyright and mobility and so on were established thanks to the EU education programs and policies (Institution B1)

Finally, when the responses for the institutions in People's Republic of China are examined, it is seen that, as in other countries, the category of curriculum and structural adjustments was mentioned by more than one interviewee, and as can be understood from the statements below, both interviewees that mentioned this topic stated the adjustment of courses taught in English regarding curriculum arrangements.

> What we are doing is to increase the level of English courses. Now we have five English courses in undergraduate studies, and we would like to increase it to 30. So more English courses, the better international education. The Erasmus progress (Institution C4).

> I think it's some of the work that we need to improve in the days too far. And if we want to attract more international students and to be more internationalized, we need to work on the English curriculum. Right now, we do not have enough English courses for international students. And this is also some of the reasons for not having international students. So, if we want to be part of the EU program, Erasmus program, again, we'll definitely, and we are already thinking to improve on this situation (Institution C5).

On the other hand, two institutions drew attention to the differences between the European and Chinese higher education systems and mentioned structural and systemic boundaries in this context. As shown in the following expression, one of these two institutions underlined the size of China and stated that they were following Chinese path and that a major change would be very difficult.

> So, you know, we have so many programs, so many courses. It is very hard to change our credits into a European system. China is quite big. We are doing the Chinese way, so it's very hard.

> Maybe that's the why China and European system are different and are not linked very well (Institution C4).

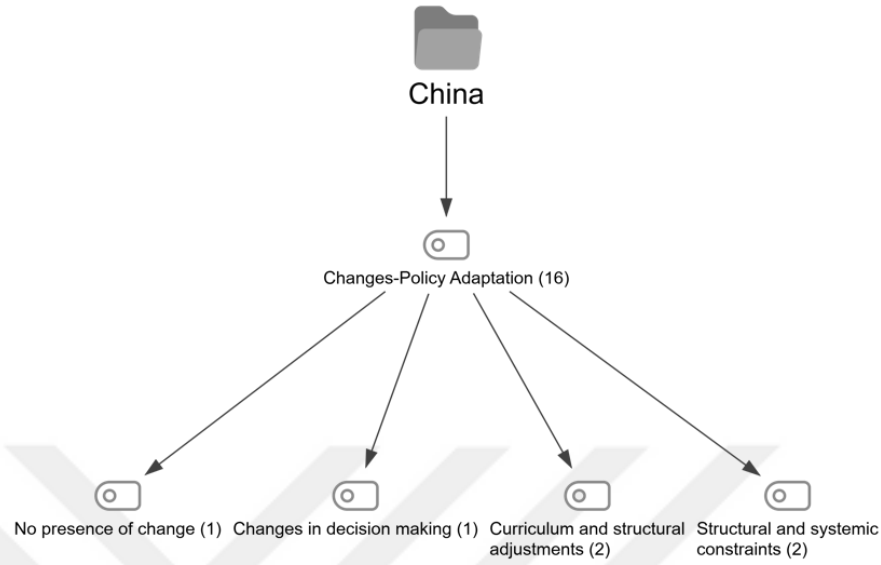


Figure 6.35 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Changes and Policy Adaptation (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Another one stated that due to the systemic and structural differences they mentioned, there should be a comprehensive transformation study and more adaptation to EU programs.

> Of course, we need to be more adaptive to this EU program, because the ECTS, credit transfer system is very much different with us. Months ago, I was asked to sign a kind of an application letter for next five years, Erasmus Plus program with university of [anonymous], we understand that we need to do a lot of changes in terms of how we promote ourselves, how we prepare our students with credit transfer. I can say it's all different. So that's why we need to work with staff of other departments, like Student Affairs Office, teaching affairs office, School of International Education, different schools, and different departments to make sure that this happens. So, it's the big work. It is a systematic work, simply put, the reason is very simple, because we are on a different system (Institution C6).

When the individual responses for the institutions in the Republic of China are considered, one of them does not actively run any EU mobility program, but has run multiple EU projects, and these projects are about university leadership. Therefore, the participant mentioned the changes in the university's decision-making mechanisms after the project, which was also influenced by the subject of the project.

> I do really learn a lot from the [anonymous] project. And when I come to the new position, and I ask my members in my office, when we do that kind of decision. We have that kind of democratic discussion. And, before making decision, we have that kind of discussion. And for the whole university. So now we are doing that kind of governance. So, for my university, like we are going to establish a new policy or a new document, we ask the advice from other departments and also from other colleges in the University (Institution C1).

Another institution, like the previous institution, does not run any EU mobility program, but has run multiple EU projects, and therefore the processes are more research-related and there was no structural transformation, according to their statements.

To conclude, the results demonstrate the important influence of institutional, local, and national filters in forming the adaptation processes for EU higher education programs. The most often mentioned adaptations were "curriculum and structural adjustments," which include making academic programs, recognition procedures, and English-language courses more consistent. For non-EU countries like Kazakhstan and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have a lengthy history of interacting with European frameworks like the Bologna Process and Erasmus programs, it seems easier to comply with the EU credit systems. These countries' responses highlight a range of adaptation, from minor adjustments brought about by previous alignment to structural modifications prompted by program requirements, demonstrating the complex interaction between institutional autonomy and outside alignment pressures. China's responses, on the other hand, highlight more serious structural and systemic issues; some institutions stated that significant changes are required to bring them into line with the EU programs. This demonstrates the constraints brought about by China's extensive higher education system and its difference from European norms. Furthermore, the statements show that although some institutions modify their curricula, others concentrate mostly on the EU projects that are research-oriented and do not require structural change.

Hence, institutions in Kazakhstan and Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed structural and curriculum-related changes and updates in the credit system and selection criteria that have been implemented with the EU programs. Even the institutions that were reported to have no need for additional changes, citing reasons such as their inclusion

in the Bologna process and their existing use of the same credit system, appear to have already implemented these adjustments during the transition to Bologna, including the adoption of the credit system.

Table 6.15 Changes and Policy Adaptation (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Curriculum and Structural Adjustments	-Difficulty in curriculum alignment, differences in the durations of different educational levels -Challenges with obligatory local courses not matching EU curriculum -Adjustments by postponing or offering online courses for exchange students -Establishment of double degree programs with the help Erasmus	-Enrollment of exchange students as local students -Development of a rule book of mobility -Recognition	-Development of English curriculum, increasing the number of courses taught in English
No need for big changes/compliance in credit system	-Being part of Bologna Process, having same credit system	we have ECTS system, don't have problems, Bologna is full in	Not applicable
Institution-specific challenges	-Changes in selection criteria -Changes in credit system -Changes in the visibility and image of the institution	Not applicable	-Structural and systemic constraints (Chinese and European system are different, not linked very well -Requirement of comprehensive and systematic work to be more adaptive to EU programs -Changes in decision making

In China, the emphasis seems to be generally on curriculum issues such as increasing the number of English courses, but the aim here seems to be not only to facilitate EU programs but also to increase internationalization in general. In addition, the responses from China touch on the differences between Chinese and European higher education systems, and therefore it is understood that possible changes and regulations to be made in China should be very comprehensive. As a result, it may be noted that institutional filters are available in every institution and programs are not directly adopted. These results also highlight that the degree of adaptation varies greatly depending on the particular context and history of engagement with EU frameworks, exposing the intricate and varied processes of adaptation in policy transfer where voluntary and coercive elements intersect with institutional and national dynamics. The most often cited results and findings summary for this sub-theme of "changes and policy adaptation" are shown in the table above.

6.4.3 Resistance or Support from Other Actors within the Institution for EU Programs and Changes Applied due to EU Programs

This sub-theme aims to explore the extent to which various stakeholders in higher education institutions—such as students, faculty members, and administrative staff—support or oppose the EU programs implemented by international offices, as well as their reactions to the institutional changes prompted by these programs, including any resistance they may exhibit.

As explained by Börzel & Risse (2003), Europeanization, particularly rational choice institutionalism refers to the existence of multiple veto points as one of the mediating factors effective in enabling or hindering domestic change due to the EU pressures of adjustment. When we adapt this approach to the higher education, as mentioned by Elken et al. (2011), the rules and regulations of the EU-induced programs are interpreted by a various number of veto players in different levels, including the individual academic staff. In some cases, these people may see the arrangements required for the implementation of these programs as a new job for them, a waste of time and effort; in other cases, they may see it as an opportunity that they can also

benefit from. From this point of view, for the effective implementation of the program, it is critical whether domestic actors such as students and veto players such as academic and administrative staff who are affected by the EU programs support them or not. On the other hand, sociological institution within the Europeanization theory is mostly about cognitive and normative Europeanization mechanisms, which refers to the process of persuasion and social learning. This is also in line with the discussion of this sub theme, since it is very likely that if other university staff believe in the legitimacy of these processes, they will be less inclined to view them as a waste of time and effort.

Similarly, in their policy transfer framework, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) identified institutional and structural elements which may lead transfer process in an incomplete or inappropriate way. In this framework, ideological incompatibility plays an important role, and this is why, support of other university actors by seeing EU programs as legitimate and ideologically familiar also seems critical. This is being said, once the responses to this question are analyzed, eight interviewees expressed support from other actors, whereas five interviewees reported opposition. Students seem as the main supporters in most of the "support" responses, highlighting the fact that they see these programs as important opportunities because they are the primary beneficiaries. On the other hand, in all resistance responses, faculty members who thought these procedures took too much time were specifically mentioned, as will be demonstrated in the following section. There were also responses indicating support from other administrative units and faculty, albeit they were quite few.

For the institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the interview responses indicate a mutual eagerness and positive view among students across institutions for participating in mobility programs like Erasmus and for the programs in general. However, faculty members' reactions are mixed; although they value mobility grants, they frequently object to working on larger projects because of time restraints, administrative demands, and a lack of assistants or other support staff. In Kazakhstan, the distribution of responses is equal, with three interviewees stating that there was resistance and three interviewees stating that there was support. Two out of four institutions in Kazakhstan provided responses in both categories.

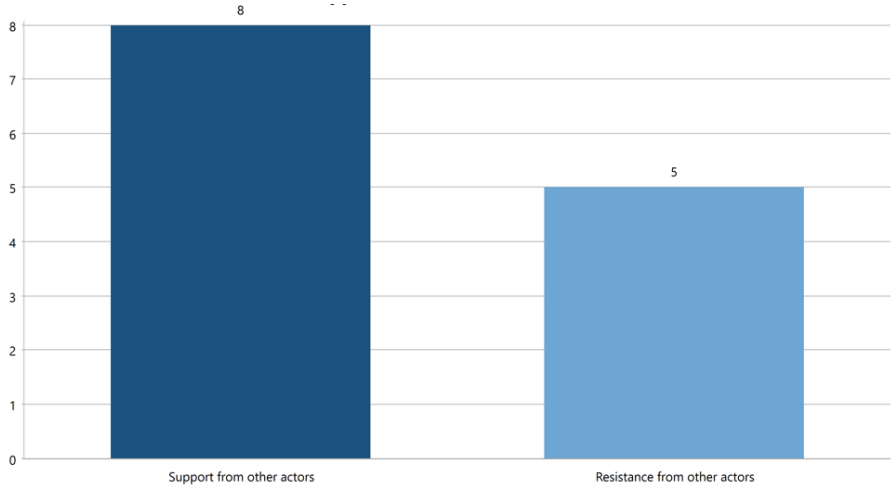


Figure 6.36 Resistance or Support from Other Actors of the Institution.

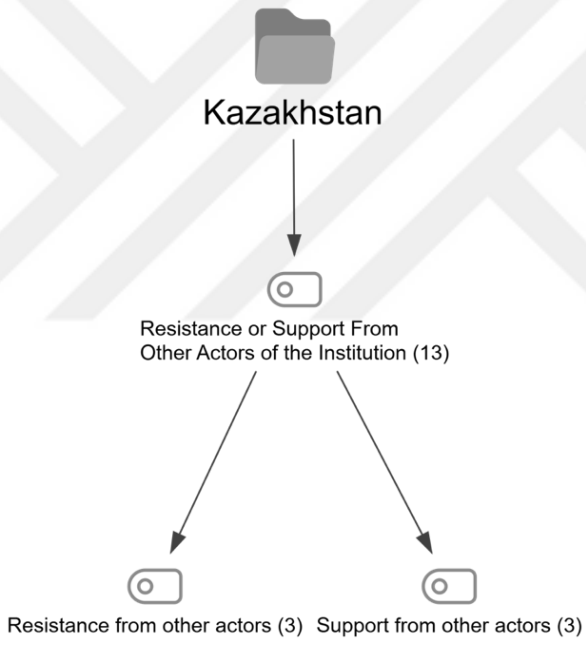


Figure 6.37 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Resistance or Support from Other Actors of the Institution (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

Institutions responding in both categories were the Institution K1 and Institution K4. As it could be seen in their quotations below, at these two institutions faculty members were reported to show excitement for mobility grants but resisted more complex projects, citing workload and administrative tasks as challenges, while students were eager to engage in international programs.

> Every time, students are very excited to receive grants and to learn that more European universities have this cooperation with our university on the Erasmus program. Faculty members, they excited about mobility grants, but not very excited about other projects because it's time consuming and takes more time on realizing such projects. They are [faculty members] happy if we just don't touch them (Institution K1).

> If it's exchange program, of course, students will be happy to join. But if it's a big project, and if I need to ask some professors to participate, then I guess it will be hard to pursue them, because we have academic hours, they need to teach, they need to do some stuff. And also, we have a lot of paperwork. And if I also tell them, let's participate in this project, in that case it, I guess it will be hard. (…) The problem is that most of our professors, they don't have assistance and they need to do by themselves, but if they will have assistants who help them to do paperwork, then they have more time. Then, of course, they will be happy to do. But unfortunately, they don't have time to do so because of lectures, because of paperwork (Institution K4).

The examples above generally indicate that faculty members complain about having no time and therefore see the processes related to the EU programs as an additional burden. However, another interviewee indicates that there were faculty members who did not see this process as ideologically close and legitimate, as explained in the theoretical framework above, and the statements of this participant are as follows: *"(…) And that difficulty is usually comes from the faculty because sometimes they do not feel why they have to implement that. Why do we have to follow EU rules? Come on we are in Kazakhstan! So, something like that (Institution K3)"*

As can be seen in the quotation below, as a unique response, another interviewee stated that all actors, including faculty members, supported the process due to its contributions on education and students as well as the similar education system between Kazakhstan and the European universities.

> I see they support it, because they know that it has impact on education, students' skills or students' communication, because when you're abroad, you need to communicate (…) I think everyone supports the EU program. Because, as I said, we have the same education system, Bologna system, so there is no big difference. It's just maybe cultural difference, but not educational difference. So, they support (Institution K2).

In summary, students across all institutions were reported to be eager to engage in international programs, while faculty support was conditional, often dependent on workload, administrative responsibilities, and alignment with the institution's educational framework.

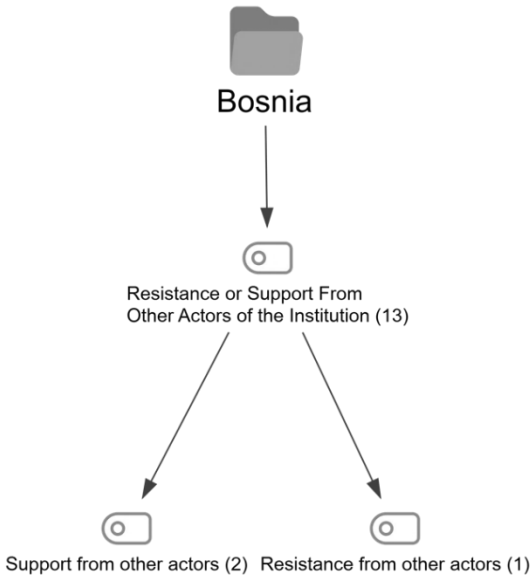


Figure 6.38 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Resistance or Support from Other Actors of the Institution (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, two interviewees provided responses falling within the "support" category, while one interviewee responded under the "resistance" category. Additionally, one interviewee offered a response that encompassed both categories, indicating that while the majority of faculty members were open-minded and generally positive, there was also resistance from those who were less open-minded. The interviewee further noted that students exhibited a highly positive attitude toward both the program itself and the changes implemented as a result of the program, emphasizing that these changes were widely understood to be student-centered. The response from this institution is provided below.

> All the changes that we did for our students, it was on their own behalf. For instance, we participated in Erasmus Mundus from 2007 until 2013 and we send around 200 students abroad, and they already had this experience that they loved it (..). So, I can see from students that they are very much interested in this. So, every change that we do, it is for them, for to apply, to follow classes abroad, to pass exams, to return. In most cases, they always come to us asking for the second mobility options as well. The most problem was created by the faculty staff who were not open minded. I have to say, a lot of them were open minded, and especially those who went to mobility. So many of them, they offer their subject in English for international students, they recognize immediately. So, in most cases, all changes that we do, they have a positive reaction. And for those who provide some kind of obstacle or not being agree with that, it takes several years. So, there is a difference between the beginning [15 years ago] and now, and I'm sure in the next few years, it will be much better than it is today. So, it changes, but the line goes up (Institution B1).

Similarly, students at the Institution B2 were also reported to see international programs as quite useful. On the other hand, the institution promotes faculty involvement by mandating that they provide courses in order for new students to take part in specific programs, indicating a methodical approach to faculty engagement. Hence, for faculty members who might not agree with this requirement, it acts as a point of resistance as well as a support system. The response for this institution is provided below.

> For everybody, it's a great thing. I always tell students because my focus is students. Somebody pays you to go abroad and to study. Why not use it? That's also for faculty, staff, and administrative stuff. We are very strict in that terms. In our decision on selection of the staff for the ethnic schools' program, we say that if the staff member wants to participate in the program, he or she needs to offer courses for incoming students, which means that if you are not on the list of the professors offering courses to incoming students, you're not going (Institution B2).

In the People's Republic of China on the other hand, no response was received from each institution for this subtheme, unfortunately. However, responses were received from three institutions, two falling under the "support" category and one encompassing both "support" and "resistance." For the institutions in the "support" category, one interviewee highlighted support primarily from students, while the other indicated support from both students and faculty members. The statements from these two interviewees are presented below.

> They are very positive about that. I myself also interview several students. And students are very open, and they are very willing to go abroad for exchanges, and Europe is one of the main destinations they want to go. And many students, when they choose [anonymous] university, they already show their preference to go to Europe rather than America. Because when they choose [anonymous] university, they value the connection of [anonymous] university to Europe in the future, it will be easier for him or her to get to European university if they study German and study in the joint programs in [anonymous] university. So, most of students here are very open minded and also open for international exchanges and collaboration. And we also have a lot of opportunities for students to go abroad here (…) it's mainly like 60% or 70% of the student can go to Europe (Institution C3).

> (…) They (faculty members) support that kind of project because they have chance to go abroad and to change their views with others. And for the students, they are also happy. And you know, for our students, we ask the doctoral candidate to attend those projects, to attend those training program of the [anonymous] project, so they are also happy to have the chance to communicate with other students from other universities in China. So, both the faculty members and the students are really happy about this project (Institution C1).

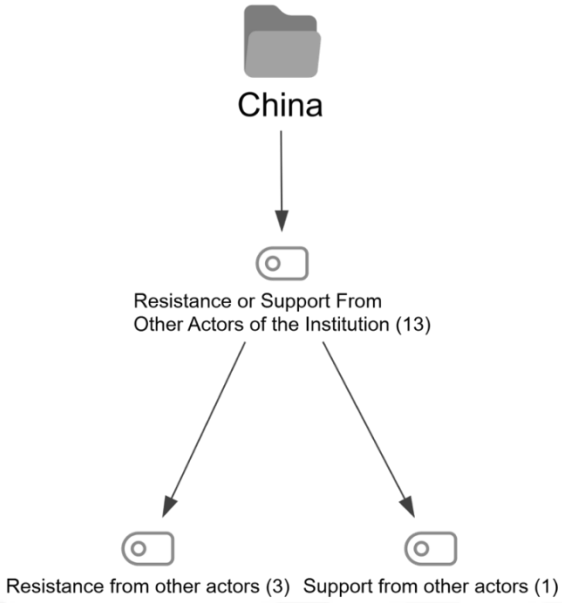


Figure 6.39 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Resistance or Support from Other Actors of the Institution (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

In contrast, Institution C5 demonstrates a more complex picture where administrative offices follow university directives, but some faculty, particularly in engineering and science, resist sending PhD students abroad due to reliance on their assistance for research. Additionally, there is reluctance to accept international students because of perceived teaching difficulties. The response from this institution is provided below.

> All the administrative offices, or professional services offices, like international office, teaching affairs, graduate school and student affairs, and also admissions office. These are university administrative offices. Of course, they do what they have to do, what they are required by the university administration, right? So, that's their responsibility. And I don't think they will reject this kind of request. And at the faculty level, or the college schools, the teachers that will be the key. Some teachers, they don't want their students to go out, because mostly, if there that's post graduate students, usually they will help their supervisors to facilitate the research work. So, if the students go out, there's nobody help the supervisor at home. So, this kind of problem here. Mainly that's the engineering or science programs supervisor. They don't want their PhD students going out. And also, many teachers in the schools, they don't want to accept international students in particular, probably [because of] their coursework. They do not perform that well in their coursework, so they think it's difficult to teach them. And some teacher will think that's additional work for them. So, from the university administration, I think we need to have such kind of impetus policy to encourage them to do this. For example, their teaching, their service for the international students can be part of their appraisal or part of their workload. That will be, I think, more acceptable for the teachers, they are more willing to do that. Or for upgrading their professorship (Institution C5).

To conclude, the examination of the support and opposition from different stakeholders in higher education institutions shows a range of viewpoints from various countries, which once again reflects the structural and contextual complexity of putting EU higher education programs into practice. Students who see international mobility programs as beneficial opportunities are consistently shown to be enthusiastic supporters. Faculty responses, however, are more complex and frequently influenced by administrative duties, workload demands, and ideological alignment.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, faculty support is generally positive but not universal, while in Kazakhstan, faculty enthusiasm for mobility grants contrasts with resistance to larger projects. Distinctive measures, like requiring faculty participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, show an institutional approach to strike a balance between resistance and support. Although there were few answers in China, they do show the difficulties administrative offices face and the unwillingness of some academics to fully participate. These results highlight how crucial institutional and cultural contexts are in influencing stakeholder attitudes and how crucial it is to address these dynamics in order to guarantee the effective execution of the EU programs.

6.4.4 Relations with Other International Offices in the Same Country

Given the theme's title, "Adaptation, Resistance, and Support on Institutional and National Levels," one of the main sub-themes examined under this heading is the nature of relationships between international offices in the same country, particularly whether or not these relationships are marked by resistance or support. Two theoretical frameworks are conceptually connected to this analysis. First, in the framework of bottom-up Europeanization, it explores whether or not international relations offices in the same country can work together to influence national decisions or initiate country-wide practices through bottom-up cooperation, or if they see each other as competitors.

Second, it is related to ideas like policy learning, horizontal policy learning, and diffusion among various actors through the sharing of knowledge and experience within the framework of policy transfer. Policy transfer, as defined in the theoretical

framework, includes both coercive and voluntary methods of disseminating information and practices (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). Additionally, the idea is similar to methods like policy learning, borrowing, and diffusion (Dale, 1994; Moisio, 2018), with policy learning being mainly voluntary. Since the goal of this analysis is to determine whether IROs promote cooperation and mutual learning for adaptation at the national level or whether competitive dynamics impede cooperative efforts, the interaction of these dynamics is especially pertinent. According to this viewpoint, the knowledge gained from this sub-theme serves as a foundation for comprehending how voluntary procedures like lesson drawing and peer learning add in the horizontal spread of EU-related practices among IROs.

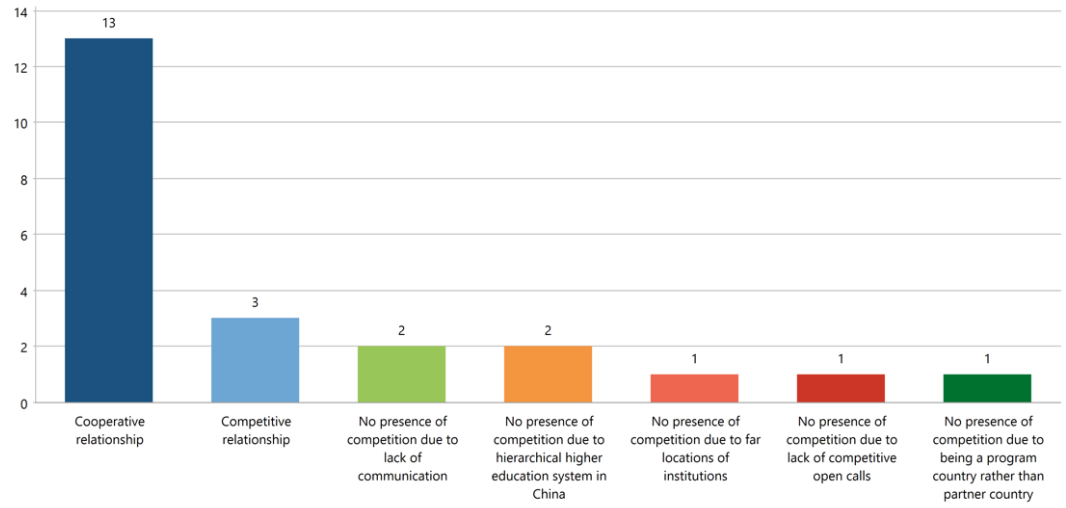


Figure 6.40 Relations with Other IROs in the Same Country.

The analysis shows that each of the 13 institutions stated that they had collaborative relationships with other international offices in their home nations. These results imply that international offices support one another at the national level through a horizontal policy learning process. Although elements of competitive relationships were mentioned in three responses (two from China and one from Kazakhstan), these were provided as an addition to their descriptions of cooperative interactions in general. Despite the cooperative nature of the primary relationship, these respondents pointed out that some aspects also display competitive dynamics. Crucially, none of the organizations characterized their interactions with other foreign offices as solely

competitive. It is clear that international offices in Kazakhstan and Bosnia and Herzegovina not only know and collaborate closely with one another, but also keep in touch on a personal level. However, the extent of cooperation between international offices in China seems to be constrained by the country's geographic size and the scattered locations of institutions across various regions. The country-specific analysis shows that, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the relationship between international offices is generally defined as cooperation, and in this sense, student exchange within the country/internal exchange is especially prominent as the basis of this cooperation. The responses also highlight the benefit of working together because they can ask each other questions when they have. Below are statements regarding the cooperative relationship between international offices and the establishment of this relationship through the exchange program within the country.

> We do exchange not only with abroad partner universities, but we also do exchange within the country. It is not like competition; it is like we gain so much if we are all together. If we have a critical question, I can directly ask my colleagues (Institution K3).
>
> Cooperation because we accept incoming students from many local universities (Institution K1).
>
> (…) Mostly it is like cooperative. We have students who went to study for one semester in [anonymous] university; it is not even another city in Kazakhstan (Institution K2).

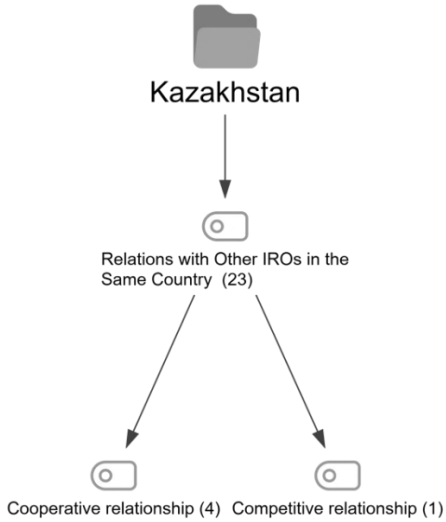


Figure 6.41 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Relations with Other IROs in the Same Country (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

In Kazakhstan, only one of the institutions stated that in addition to the cooperative relationship, it also had a competitive side, as some institutions received less funding from the Ministry and some more, and the statement of this institution is as follows*: "It depends on to be honest. For example, we have ministry grant. Some university get more money, some universities get less money (Institution K2)."*

Similarly, the relationship between international offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina is generally defined as cooperation, and in this sense, the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a partner country, not a program country (and therefore does not compete for the budget by applying for Erasmus funds for now) is explained as one of the reasons for this cooperative relationship. Moreover, it is also highlighted that they have closer relations at the lower level due to complex governmental structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The relevant statement in this regard in presented below.

> It is not competition, at least not for us. We all cooperated in one capacity building project. I would not say we are on daily basis communicating, but definitely weekly or monthly or when something is needed. We have a very complex government here and structure when it comes to education, everything is on the lower level. It is not on the national level, but lower level. So, we kind of depend on each other. We are not program country, but partner country. So, we are still not in that process of competing. I am sure there will be some way of competition in the future, but for now, let's say calm and peace (Institution B1).

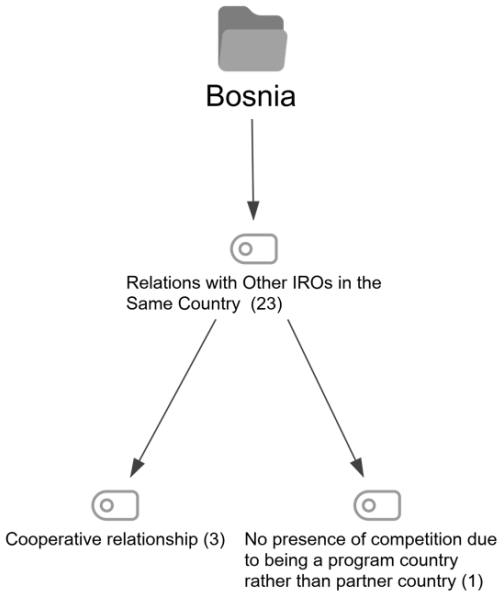


Figure 6.42 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Relations with Other IROs in the Same Country (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

According to the responses of another interviewee from Bosnia and Herzegovina, understanding that it is not possible to compete due to the difference in the size of the universities come to the fore as the basis of this cooperation. This institution also stated that they organized a joint staff week with another higher education institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the mentioned cooperative relationship and the relevant quotation is as follows. *"International staff week, we do together with the University of [anonymous]. I am in a daily contact with them. I have a very good relation. It is cooperation, because I can never compare to the University of* [anonymous], *I am small medium-sized university (Institution B2)"*

Finally, when the responses of the interviewees from People's Republic of China are considered, it is seen that all six institutions define a cooperative relationship, but two institutions also state that they have competitive aspects.

The reason for the lack of a competitive relationship between international offices in China has been explained with several different reasons. One is that due to the size of China, each institution is located in a different part of the country, and the quotation for this is as follows. *"I call that kind of cooperation because we don't have that competition. We just have each other, because each of the university is in the different part of China (Institution C1)".* As stated below, another reason for the lack of a competitive relationship between international offices in China is explained as lack of communication.

> (…) When you come to international collaboration, we don't compete with others. We get to know more about Chinese universities from this network [Erasmus project network], because usually we are working on our own, we don't know much about our neighbor universities. We don't have that much communication in general (Institution C3).

Similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, another reason for the cooperative relationship was that China was not a program country and therefore did not have to compete for the project budget, as stated in the quotation below. *"(…) Because it is the European universities that are taking the leading role to apply for funding. It is not like an open call and then I need to compete with other universities in China (Institution C3)."*

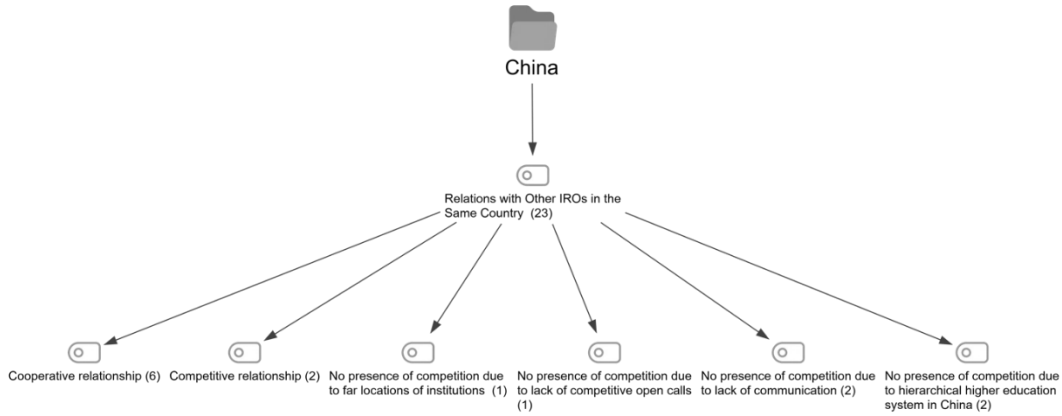


Figure 6.43 Frequency of the Codes for the Sub-Theme of Relations with Other IROs in the Same Country (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

Finally, and interestingly, two interviewees explained the lack of a competitive relationship between international offices by the hierarchical structure within the Chinese higher education system, and therefore institutions that are already at the top of this hierarchy do not see the need to compete with other institutions, as exemplified in the quotations below.

> Most of them, collaboration. The Chinese higher education system is very hierarchical; we are already top 11 or 12 in the country. So, when you come to international collaboration, we don't compete with others (Institution C3).

> We are considered as a part of the big family. So, people work in these same areas are very friendly to each other, we work together, but of course, confidentiality is always highly attended. So, I will say that there's no rival, no malicious feeling against each other in this area. Because in China, if you are part of the prestigious university, and normally you are considered comparatively better than the other non-prestigious one. So, to us, it is not. We're not competing with each other for the students (Institution C6).

On the other hand, two interviewees in China described one aspect of their relationship, which is essentially based on cooperation, as competition. One of them mentioned international rankings, the other mentioned competition in attracting researchers and faculty members as basis of this competition, and their statements are given below.

> It is more like cooperation; we have quite regular contacts like conferences and network. Competition as well of course, many universities they are focusing on rankings (Institution C4).

> We don't need more students. So, basically, it is not a marketization competition, but somehow, we compete in another way that is the battlefield called research production. We compete for good researchers. We compete for professors (Institution C6).

To conclude, the analysis of the relationships between international relations offices in the three countries shows that cooperative dynamics are more common, though there are some subtle variations that are influenced by national contexts. Cooperation in Kazakhstan is frequently based on joint student exchange initiatives within the country, where institutions gain from one another's support and common experience.

Disparities in ministry funding allocations, however, led one institution to identify a slight competitive element. Due to Bosnia and Herzegovina's complicated political system and non-EU status, which excludes direct competition for Erasmus funds, cooperation is also valued there. Respondents from the Bosnian institutions emphasized useful partnerships, like staff weeks, but they also acknowledged that competition might arise as the country moves closer to EU membership.

The geographical size and hierarchical structure of the Chinese higher education system are reflected in the cooperative relationships between international offices in China. Because there was no direct interaction and no budgetary competition under EU programs, institutions in various regions reported little competition. Some institutions did, however, point out competitive elements related to international rankings and hiring researchers and faculty.

As a result, it is understood that a cooperative relationship with other international offices in the country is depicted in all three countries, which imply that international offices in all three countries having a horizontal policy learning relationship with each other and they may come together in a common agreement at the bottom, allowing them to influence or initiate a national decision. The table below displays the most frequently cited findings and results for this sub-theme of “relations with other IROs in the country”.

Table 6.16 Relations with other IROs in the country (Country-Based).

	Republic of Kazakhstan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	People's Republic of China
Cooperation	Mostly cooperation	Mostly cooperation	Mostly cooperation
Basis of Cooperation	Student exchange program within the country / internal exchange	Being a partner country & no need to compete for the budget. Closer relations at the lower level due to complex governmental structure	Size of China; each institution is located in a different part of the country. Lack of communication Being a partner country & no need to compete for the budget. Due to hierarchical structure of Chinese higher education system, no need to compete for institutions who are already at the top of this structure.
Competition	Emphasis of one institution on the unequal distribution of national funding from the Ministry among the institutions	Not applicable	International rankings Attracting researchers and faculty members

6.5 Conclusion of the Chapter

During the analysis of the qualitative data, concise conclusions and tables summarizing each sub-theme and country-specific findings were already included under the relevant sub-sections. Therefore, there is no need for an additional written conclusion for this section. Instead, for the purpose of summarizing the findings, tables consolidating the results for the three countries have been prepared and are presented below.

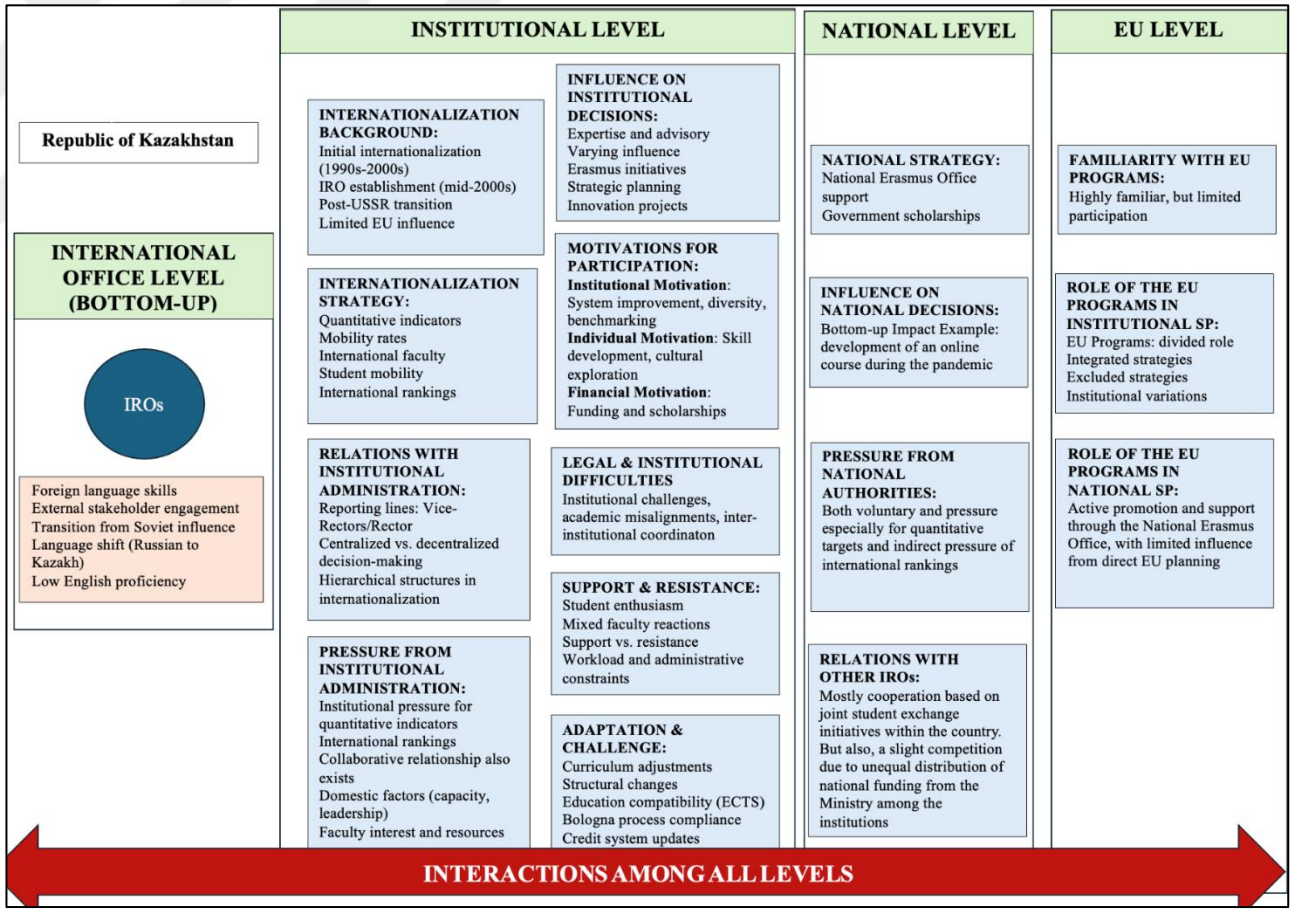


Figure 6.44 Summary of the Findings (Country-Based: Republic of Kazakhstan).

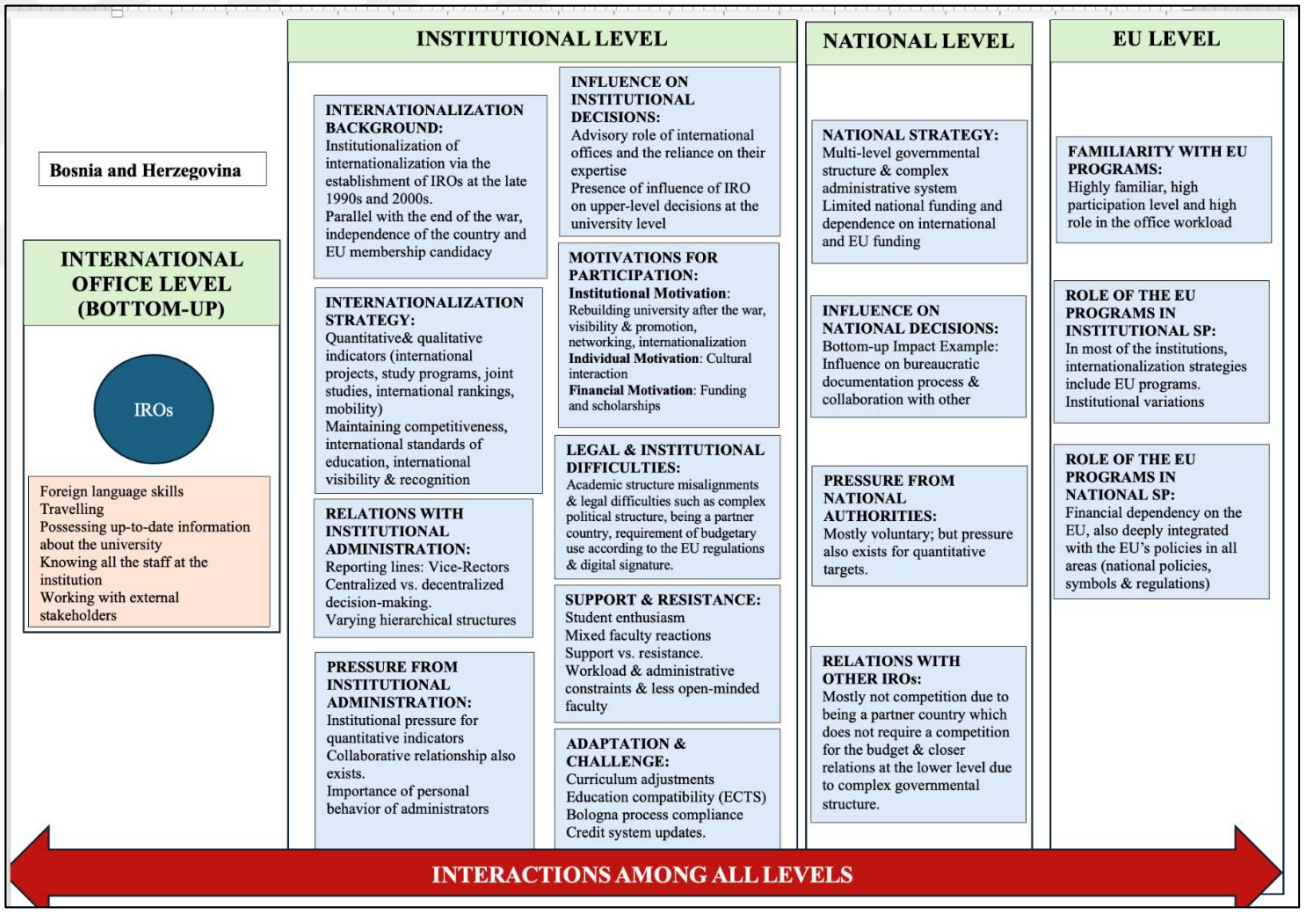


Figure 6.45 Summary of the Findings (Country-Based: Bosnia and Herzegovina).

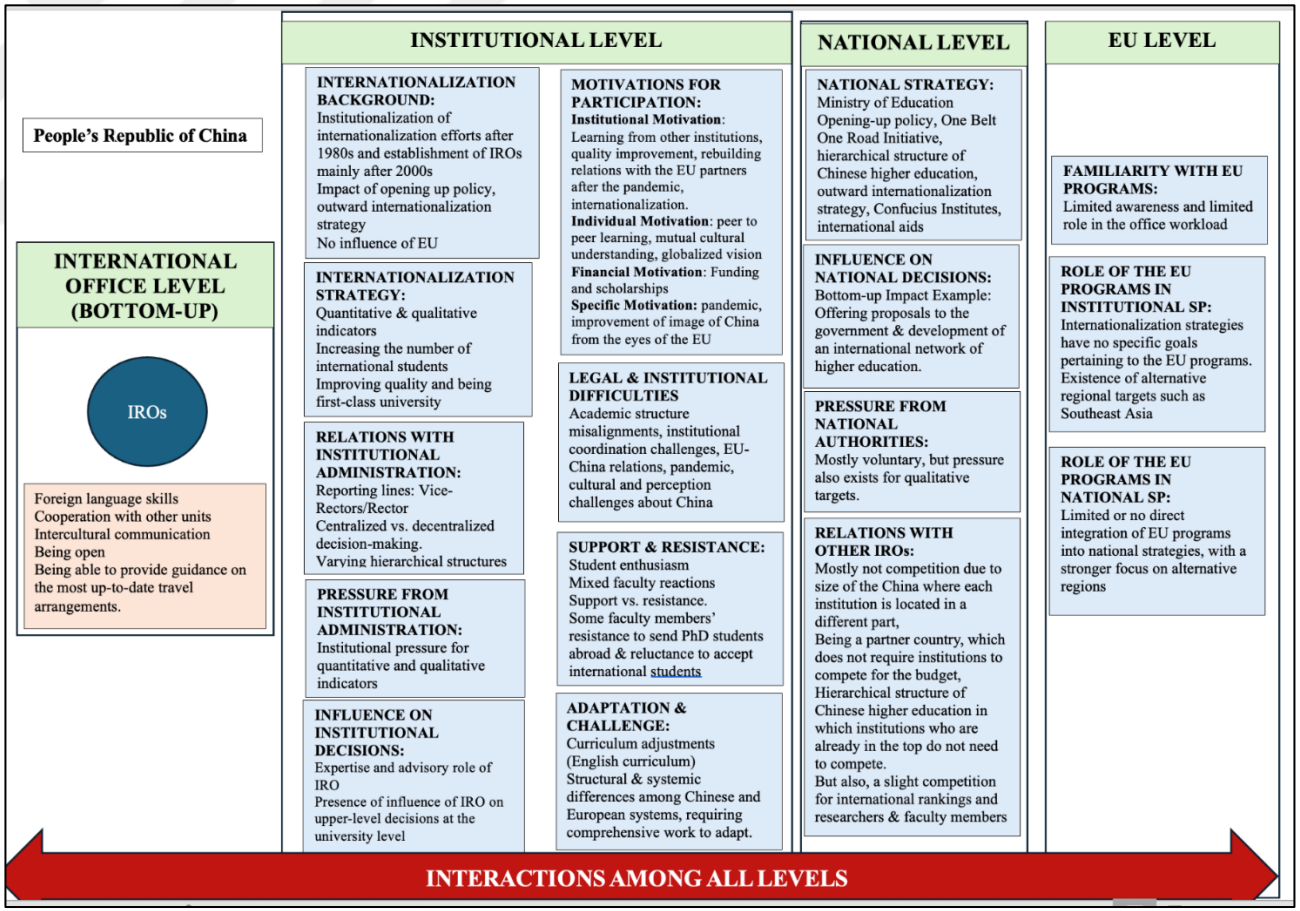


Figure 6.46 Summary of the Findings (Country-Based: People's Republic of China).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

"Reasoning draws a conclusion, but does not make the conclusion certain, unless the mind discovers it by the path of experience." **(Roger Bacon)**

The contemporary higher education landscape is shaped by the growing importance of internationalization, a process that has become indispensable for universities worldwide. In this era where institutions are determined to enhance their global visibility, attract diverse talent, and foster international collaborations, internationalization has evolved into a key driver of academic excellence and competitiveness. This trend is further intensified by increasing student and staff mobility, as young generations seek opportunities to explore new cultures, broaden their horizons, and engage with global networks, enabled by advancements in communication and transportation technologies. Mobility programs like Erasmus, celebrated for their role in fostering cross-cultural exchange and collaboration, have gained unprecedented attention and participation. Against this backdrop, this study emerged from the need to delve deeper into the often-overlooked actors who operationalize these transformative initiatives—International Office Professionals (IOPs).

To this end, this concluding chapter first revisits the initial purpose of the study. Accordingly, it is essential to emphasize that this research aims to address the following research questions.

1. Can the IOPs, as the main unit of analysis, influence intermediate or upper-level actors from the bottom? In that sense, what roles do the IOPs play in the policy transfer and implementation process within the organizational hierarchy of their institutions, with regard to the EU higher education programs?

2. What challenges and difficulties do the IOPs encounter during the policy transfer and implementation of the EU higher education programs into their unique institutional and national contexts? How do the IOPs navigate and address these challenges in their respective institutional and national frameworks?

3. How do distinct institutional and national settings of these three countries and different forms of relations with the EU influence the interpretation, implementation, and outcomes of the EU higher education programs?

4. How do the IOPs in HEIs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China perceive and interpret the EU higher education programs and policies within their domestic and institutional contexts?

The EU has successfully influenced higher education through soft mechanisms such as Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and programs like Erasmus, which have grown geographically over time, although it lacks explicit legal authority in the area of education and particularly higher education as the focus of this study. This being said, this dissertation analyses how International Office Professionals (IOPs) in three non-EU countries namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China view, understand, and carry out EU higher education programs in their distinct institutional and domestic contexts. In light of the originally collected qualitative data from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China —all of which represent unique sociopolitical environments and differing levels of EU engagement—this study has shed light on the aspects of Europeanization and policy transfer in higher education outside the boundaries of the European Union. To this end, this concluding chapter summarizes the main conclusions, assesses the theoretical consequences, and offers suggestions for institutions, policymakers, and further research.

The main qualitative technique used in this study was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a detailed investigation of the perspectives and experiences of International Office Professionals (IOPs) in higher education institutions. The qualitative method helped this study collect delicate insights and enable participants

to express their understandings, motivations, and difficulties in their own words, as well as in relation to their specific institutional and national contexts.

The selection of the IOPs, who occupy a central role in implementing and interpreting EU higher education policies on the ground, enabled the study to reveal how these individuals navigate between broader policy frameworks and their local realities. Moreover, focusing on three non-EU countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, and Kazakhstan—confirmed that the analysis spanned a range of geopolitical, cultural, and institutional environments, each with varying levels of engagement with the EU.

Qualitative data was collected through 13 semi-structured interviews with the representatives of 13 higher education institutions in three different countries in the period of August-November 2024. Although this may not appear as a particularly large sample size, several factors underscore the significance of these data. First, the interviews spanned three distinct national contexts, adding geographic and cultural diversity to the dataset. Secondly, each participant was an international office professional directly engaged with international programs and the EU higher education initiatives, ensuring that the insights gathered were both highly relevant to the study's aims and closely aligned with the institutional realities of policy implementation, combined with the educational systems and EU engagement of the countries.

This being said, before highlighting the most prominent findings, I would like to express my personal impressions about the interview process. Interviewing international offices in Chinese, Kazakhstani, and Bosnian higher education institutions was an intellectually challenging and inquisitive experience. I had entered a dynamic and varied world, where every country and institution had a different viewpoint on internationalization and how it related to the EU initiatives. The most striking thing to me was the extreme diversity, not only between countries, but even within a single country. Moreover, while some responses closely aligned with my initial expectations, others diverged in unexpected ways, forcing me to reconsider my assumptions and deepen my understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

Additionally, it should be highlighted that there were difficulties in conducting interviews only online, especially when dealing with language barriers and varying fluency levels. Overall, all participants demonstrated a degree of English proficiency. However, while some participants exhibited advanced English language skills, there were also instances where I needed to clarify the meaning of certain expressions for a few participants.

Moreover, I felt that some participants approached the discussions more cautiously, carefully considering what they were saying in recorded videos, while others spoke with remarkable clarity and confidence. Individual personalities, participants' language skills, engagement levels as well as more general contextual elements like organizational culture and professional hierarchies were reflected in this variance. I was able to obtain rich, in-depth responses to nearly all of the questions in some interviews, but in a few instances, there were gaps where participants either avoided certain subjects or gave more generic answers. On the other hand, semi-structured nature of the interviews provided an important advantage. In all interviews, it was possible to conduct more in-depth interviews that were shaped by the answers given by the participants and went into more detail about these answers, rather than just standard questions. For this reason, some interviews lasted much longer than expected.

In spite of the difficulties, the fieldwork generated interesting accounts that highlighted the implementation dynamics of EU-induced and international programs at the institutional and national level. In the end, the range of reactions and experiences acted as a reminder of the complexity of internationalizing higher education and the crucial influence of the local contexts.

We now turn to the findings derived from the qualitative data and their examination within the context of the dissertation's research questions. The first research question is: *Can the IOPs, as the main unit of analysis, influence intermediate or upper-level actors from the bottom? What roles do the IOPs play in the policy transfer and implementation process within the organizational hierarchy of their institutions, with regard to the EU higher education programs?* When analyzing the sub-themes and findings that could provide an answer to this question, the following key insights

emerge. In that regard, an important finding in the institutional level is that even though senior leadership, like Rectors or Vice-Rectors, oversees international offices, the IOPs still seem to have a significant impact on institutional decisions about internationalization and the EU projects. Even in cases where decision-making was centralized, the IOPs' knowledge and guidance were highly respected. Thus, their specialized knowledge frequently guided institutional directions and policy adaptations, even though they did not have formal decision-making authority. However, the degree of this influence seems to vary according to the domestic, administrative, and institutional structures, frameworks and priorities. While some offices played a major role in establishing institutional internationalization agendas, others were mainly supportive by providing advice or making mobility easier. To show their impact, participants explained different initiatives initiated by international offices and then disseminated at the institutional level. For instance, participants in Republic of Kazakhstan exemplified development of a comprehensive map for internationalization and online academy initiated by the international offices. Similarly, the participants in Bosnia and Herzegovina explained the development of staff week, which was not known and understood by the institutional administration at the beginning but then widely accepted and appreciated as well as their role as suggestions for decision making on partnership. Lastly, participants in the People's Republic of China exampled the development of people-to-people exchange course for international students and the development of a medical program with UK partners which also attracted the Ministry's attention at the end. These examples show that the transfer of the EU policies are not one-dimensional or top-down and the IOPs serve as a crucial bottom-up mediator in this context.

However, at the national level, it is less likely that the IOPs are as influential as they are at the institutional level. In each country, participants provided only one example initiated by the international offices at the national level. For instance, one participant in Kazakhstan explained the establishment of a specific course initiated by the suggestions of the international office and later collaborated with the Ministry. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a result of the pressure exerted by the international offices in the country, the number of documents required for the

residence permit processes of international students has been reduced. And finally, a participant from China explained that their international office established a comprehensive international network in which there were 30 universities from different countries, and which is now supported by the city administration. Hence, at the national level, there are only a few examples of the IOPs influencing decisions. However, the finding is still promising, because it implies that if they are backed by other international offices in the same country, it may influence the more substantial changes at the national level in the future.

Relatedly, it is also important to understand how international offices relate to other international offices in the country in terms of their influence at the national level, since these professionals can create influence at the national level by coming together and exerting pressure. Despite minor variances impacted by the national contexts, almost all the participants mention a collaborative relationship with other international offices in the same country. Thus, international offices in all three contexts seem to establish horizontal policy-learning networks that allow them to find common ground at the local level and possibly impact or initiate national-level decisions. But it should be stated here that, as some participants also mentioned, the most basic reason for this collaborative relationship is that in Erasmus+ programs, partner countries do not apply and compete for the program budget; they are integrated into the program countries' applications. Therefore, since they do not compete for a fund, cooperation becomes a more prominent relationship. For example, a participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that this situation would probably change, if Bosnia and Herzegovina become a program country. On the other hand, the most important element of cooperation in the Republic of Kazakhstan stands out as exchange activities among the institutions within the country. Once we look at China, there are participants stating that due to the size of the country, each institution is located in a different part of the country and that communication is not very tight. There are also those who say that due to the hierarchical structure of the Chinese higher education system, there is no need for institutions that are already at the top level to compete. On the other hand, some participants indicated that despite all this, there is also some competition in terms of international rankings and international researchers in China.

As a result, the summary of the findings regarding this research question is that although they are not decision-makers, the IOPs exert significant influence through their specialized knowledge, by guiding the institutional strategies. The degree of influence varies; it is more evident in institutional decision-making than at the national level, with occasional examples of the IOPs impacting national decisions through collaborative networks and policy-learning mechanisms.

The second research question is: *What challenges and difficulties do the IOPs encounter during the policy transfer and implementation of the EU higher education programs into their unique institutional and national contexts? How do the IOPs navigate and address these challenges in their respective institutional and national frameworks?* When examining the findings that address this research question, the qualitative data also reveal that institutions identified academic misalignments (mostly related to academic procedures, such as conflicts between academic calendars, incompatibilities between credit and grading systems, variations in academic programs, problems with course recognition, and courses that are offered in different languages) and challenges in inter-institutional communication, as well as the legal and bureaucratic difficulties as the most significant obstacles to the implementation of Erasmus+ and other international programs. In order to address these challenges, institutions seem to make some institutional changes which once again shows that the EU policies are barely adopted directly. Instead, they made curricular and structural changes (e.g. adoption of ECTS credits, modifications in the credits of the courses, delaying must courses to the later periods, courses offered in English, registration process of exchange students, the creation of guidelines for mobility processes and the obligation to recognize courses taken during the exchange periods) to adapt them to local contexts. Negotiations and institutional filters are observed to influence this process, showing that ongoing interpretation and revision—rather than just adoption—is how policy transfer happens. In this context, participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Kazakhstan mostly mentioned curricular and structural changes (largely related with the Bologna Process); Chinese participants on the other hand mostly mentioned the need to increase English medium courses. Other than that, participants in China indicated that there has not been or no need for big

structural change due to structural and systemic constraints and differences among Chinese and European higher education systems, which requires a comprehensive adaptation process, according to participants' own words.

To gain a deeper understanding of this aspect, I also inquired whether university members, including students and staff, support the EU higher education programs and the institutional changes implemented as a result of these programs. This consideration stems from the possibility that their attitudes could either present an additional challenge or serve as a source of support in addressing the current difficulties encountered during the implementation of these programs. The analysis reveals that in general, students supported and embraced international and EU programs, viewing them as a rewarding experience. However, some instances show that faculty members may act as veto players as more complex faculty attitudes were associated with administrative demands, workload, and individual perspectives on international and EU programs.

Regarding another type of challenge that the IOPs may encounter during the implementation of programs, I inquired whether they experience any form of pressure from institutional or national authorities. The analysis of the qualitative data in institutional level shows that in all three countries, institutional internationalization strategies heavily rely on quantitative indicators like rankings, mobility numbers, and the number of international students and faculty. In some institutions, qualitative indicators—which focus on goals like increasing quality, visibility, and competitiveness—also remain significant despite being less frequently discussed. For this reason, the most frequently reported sources of internationalization pressure across all countries were the urge to rise quantitative measures, such as the number of international students, faculty involvement, projects, and rankings. However, this pressure was generally not described as a top-down coercive force from institutional or national authorities; rather, it was typically attributed to the internalized international competition and the influence of global rankings on the higher education institutions. Many institutions seem to balance their own plans with outside demands while participating voluntarily in the EU programs. Similarly, the national level

analysis shows that in most cases, national authorities' pressure focused on numerical targets instead of requiring the adoption of programs from the top down coercively.

As a result, the second research question is effectively addressed as the findings highlight challenges such as academic misalignments, inter-institutional communication issues, and bureaucratic obstacles. Institutions address these difficulties through curricular and structural adaptations tailored to local contexts, rather than direct adoption of EU policies. Additionally, while institutional and national pressures focus heavily on achieving quantitative targets like rankings and mobility numbers, these pressures are more reflective of international competition rather than coercive top-down mandates. Students generally support THE EU programs, while faculty attitudes vary depending on the perceived workload and administrative procedures.

The third research question is: *How do distinct institutional and national settings of these three countries and different forms of relations with the EU influence the interpretation, implementation, and outcomes of the EU higher education programs?* When examining the sub-themes and findings relevant to this question, several key insights come to light. The analysis of the field research findings at the institutional level reveals that internationalization was largely institutionalized across the three countries in the 2000s, reflecting their distinct political and economic contexts as well as their varying relationships with the EU. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, one participant institution reported international activities as early as 1965. However, the establishment of international offices and the institutionalization of internationalization primarily occurred after the war, particularly in the second half of the 2000s. Bosnia and Herzegovina's internationalization efforts have been significantly influenced by the EU programs, especially by the Erasmus program, as well as the country's EU candidate status and alignment efforts with the EU regulations. Similarly, internationalization in Kazakhstan became more prominent after the 2000s, specifically following the dissolution of the USSR. This process was shaped by the diminishing Soviet influence, with the EU playing a more limited role in the initial internationalization activities. In contrast, China's earliest international activities (among the participant institutions) date back to the first half of the 1990s,

reflecting its historical legacy as an ancient dynasty. However, internationalization efforts became more structured starting from the 1980s, with international offices being established predominantly after the 2000s. Unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan, the EU had no discernible perceived influence on China's internationalization processes, which were instead driven by the country's opening-up policy and outward-oriented strategies such as "Study in China" and Confucius Institutes launched after the 2010s.

Moreover, a detailed comparison of the cases from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China demonstrate how different national contexts affected the implementation and modification of the EU higher education policies.

Firstly, the qualitative data affirm that higher education landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been influenced by the post-war reconstruction efforts and a complicated, multi-level governance structure. Universities' internationalization efforts are hindered by fragmented regulations, cantonal disparities, and a lack of government funding, which drives them to turn to outside sources, particularly the EU programs. Expectations are met by this scenario, as participants emphasize the value of financial incentives and the EU's role in supporting strategic advancements. As a prospective EU candidate country since 2003 and an official candidate country since 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to align its higher education reforms with the EU standards. Active participation in the EU schemes such as Erasmus program and the Bologna Process can be observed to be central to its internationalization efforts. Due to their early participation in the Bologna Process, Bosnian higher education institutions are comparatively accustomed to the EU frameworks in terms of structural and curriculum modifications. Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina mainly stated that they had little trouble implementing the EU credit systems or selection criteria, indicating that earlier alignments made later reforms easier. Some organizations continue to be constrained by hierarchical approval processes, while others function under more cooperative and decentralized models. However, all the Bosnian interviewees seem to agree that EU-driven adjustments are essential to

improve institutional quality and overall global competitiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina's changing higher education environment.

With regards to the Republic of Kazakhstan, although the EU initiatives are not always at the center of their activities, the country's strategic shift away from Soviet legacy and its aim to modernize curricula, governance, and overall educational quality can be observed to have contributed to the high level of awareness and interest in these frameworks. Indicating a desire to combine external models with domestically driven mobility programs and capacity-building initiatives, the majority of participants from Kazakhstan emphasized the significance of government scholarships and domestic funding. In terms of structure, the interviewed Kazakhstani institutions represented both highly centralized and more decentralized models of decision-making, which reflected a landscape with significant variations in institutional autonomy. Moreover, the participants mostly mentioned financial and institutional incentives for participating in the EU programs, especially Erasmus, which they see as a model essential for raising quality and conforming to international norms. Also, no significant legal or bureaucratic barriers were reported, despite the observation of academic misalignments and communication difficulties. Furthermore, the National Erasmus+ Office appears to be crucial in Kazakhstan, where it actively promotes the Erasmus program while providing guidance and coordination. Similar to Bosnian institutions, Kazakh institutions are relatively accustomed to EU frameworks in terms of structural and curriculum modifications because of their early involvement in the Bologna Process.

Finally, the findings from the People’s Republic of China show that despite significant government investment and the opening of China's higher education system since the 1980s and institutionalization of internationalization since the early 2000s, there is still a lack of operational familiarity with the EU programs both in institutional and national strategies, which rather have alternative regional focus such as Southeast Asia. Unlike other respondents, the Chinese respondents are also interested in socio-political issues, such as China-EU relations and the country's international image, rather than in merely technical or institutional difficulties. Even though curriculum changes (such as increasing the number of English-taught courses) and alignment with the EU standards

are acknowledged, respondents also mention that putting such changes into practice in China's enormous and structurally peculiar higher education system (which is different than European higher education system according to the participants) would be a large challenge. Similar to other countries, there is a slight pressure on quantitative measures, like the number of international students and agreements, but it is not as strong as one might anticipate considering China's centralized system of government. Moreover, in contrast to Kazakhstan, where the majority of participants mentioned government scholarships despite their limited availability, it is surprising that none of the Chinese participants mentioned the country's substantial investments in higher education or the scholarships offered to international students. Considering that China is the second-largest economy in the world and plays a significant role in higher education worldwide, this omission is especially noteworthy. Similarly, one can expect that financial motivations would not be brought up as one of factors that encourage institutions to be part of the EU programs, considering that China is one of the biggest economies in the world which is well-known for its outward-focused internationalization strategy, its own scholarship programs, and its large investments in higher education. But interestingly, the respondents from China mentioned the financial motivations in relation to the EU programs too.

As a result, the third research question has been effectively addressed through the findings, which reveal how institutional and national contexts shape the implementation and outcomes of EU higher education programs across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and China. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fragmented governance structure and reliance on the EU financial incentives heavily influence institutional alignment with the EU frameworks, while Kazakhstan combines domestic funding initiatives with the EU programs to modernize its education system. In contrast, China's alternative regional focus and structural differences from the EU system limit its integration with the EU programs, although financial motivations and socio-political considerations also play a role. In summary, the findings demonstrate that national and institutional contexts significantly mediate the adoption and adaptation of EU programs, with varying levels of alignment and challenges across the

three countries. This confirms that local contexts and varying relations with the EU are critical factors in shaping how policies are implemented.

The final research question is: *How do the IOPs in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, and People's Republic of China perceive and interpret the EU higher education programs and policies within their domestic and institutional contexts?* Upon reviewing the sub-themes and findings related to this question, several important insights become evident. The analysis reveals differing levels of familiarity and operational significance of the EU higher education programs across the three countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the IOPs and HEIs demonstrated a strong familiarity with these programs, with the Erasmus+ forming a significant portion of their international office activities. Similarly, participants from the Republic of Kazakhstan displayed substantial knowledge of the programs, but their operational impact appeared limited due to budgetary constraints and quotas set by partner institutions. In contrast, the participants from the institutions in the People's Republic of China exhibited less familiarity, with only one institution actively conducting the Erasmus+ mobility programs and a few involved in the Erasmus+ projects rather than mobility activities. Thus, for the IOPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan, the EU programs are perceived to be known and valuable resources, whereas for the interviewed IOPs in China, they remain relatively unfamiliar, distant, and less integrated.

This varying familiarity also influences the role of EU programs and their contributions to institutional internationalization strategies. While the EU programs are frequently referenced in the strategic plans of the interviewed HEIs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to some extent in Kazakhstan, such references are absent in the Chinese institutions, where no specific goals related to the EU were stated by the IOPs. Furthermore, the analysis of motivations for participating in the EU programs highlights financial incentives, institutional goals (e.g., improving quality and visibility), and individual benefits (e.g., enhancing student employability and fostering cross-cultural skills) as the primary drivers mentioned by the interviewed IOPs.

To sum up, the final research question has been effectively addressed, revealing significant insights into how the IOPs perceive and interpret the EU higher education programs within their domestic and institutional contexts. The study demonstrates that familiarity with and the operational significance of the EU programs vary across the three countries, shaping their roles in institutional internationalization strategies. While the financial, institutional, and individual motivations drive participation in all three contexts, the EU programs are more strategically embedded in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan compared to China.

As a result, by examining the current dynamics of the EU programs in these three non-EU countries and how the IOPs perceive these processes, as well as analyzing the logic of variations among the three countries through the roles assumed by the IOPs, the primary argument derived from the analysis of qualitative data within the scope of the research questions is that the IOPs play a pivotal role in mediating and implementing the EU higher education programs within their respective institutions. The research reveals that the IOPs are not merely administrative functionaries but also act as critical intermediaries who interpret, adapt, and align with the EU initiatives with local contexts. Their expertise and strategic involvement are essential in facilitating the internationalization of the HEIs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and China. By bridging gaps between the EU policies and domestic educational frameworks, the IOPs contribute significantly to the successful integration of international programs.

In that regard, it is also observed that the processes of internationalization and transfer of the EU policies are not one-dimensional or top-down. Rather, the IOPs serve as a crucial, bottom-up mediator. Although these offices operate under different governance models (centralized or decentralized, top-down or more autonomous), they all function within the same EU framework, which makes them more important interpreters and implementers. The IOPs play a bottom-up, mediating role in shaping institutional and sometimes national-level decisions by adapting the external EU policies to their local contexts rather than merely applying them as they are.

Relatedly, another core argument of this dissertation is that the IOPs operate at the nexus of multiple levels. Intra-institutionally, they act as advisors to university

leadership, integrating internationalization efforts with institutional goals. Inter-institutionally**,** they collaborate with peers in other universities, both domestically and internationally, sharing best practices, fostering partnerships and establishing horizontal policy learning networks. Although not as common as at the institutional level, nationally**,** they also interact with policymakers to align institutional strategies with national frameworks, potentially influencing national-level decision-making. Lastly, at the European level, they engage with the EU representatives and their European counterparts, bridging gaps between local practices and European expectations.

In this regard, analysis also reveals that the decision-making and implementation processes of the EU programs are characterized by a reciprocal interaction across all levels of governance and authority. At the core are the International Relations Offices (the main unit of analysis), whose expertise and operational insights directly influence institutional strategies and policies. These, in turn, intersect with the priorities and directives of institutional administration and top management (medium level of analysis). At a broader scale, national authorities (higher level of analysis) and regional or international organizations (top level of analysis) contribute overarching frameworks and incentives, while also responding to institutional and local adaptations. This multi-level dynamic highlights the interconnected nature of decision-making, where each level informs and shapes the processes at the others, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and alignment across the governance spectrum. A visual representation of this interactive relationship is provided below.

Furthermore, the study identifies variations in the roles and effectiveness of the IOPs across the three countries, influenced by the factors such as institutional autonomy, national policy environments, and the degree of alignment with the EU educational standards. While in all three cases, the IOPs are integral to the success of the EU programs as part of their universities' internationalization strategies, the extent of their influence and expertise varies depending on institutional capacities, national governance structures, and historical relationships with the EU.

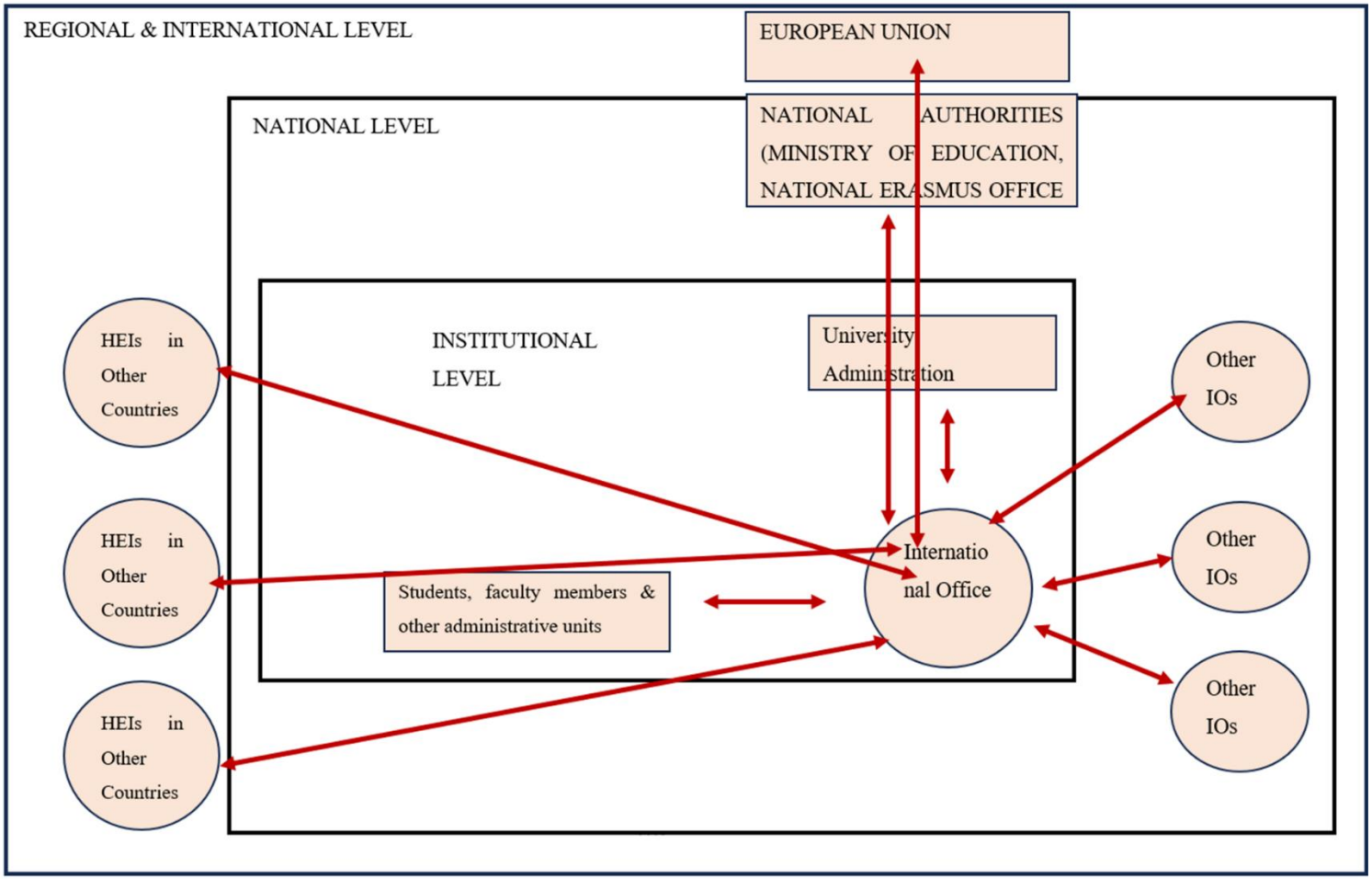


Figure 7.1 Relations and Interactions at all Levels of Analysis.

For instance, the interviewed IOPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibit a strong alignment with the EU frameworks due to the country's EU candidacy status, whereas those in Kazakhstan demonstrate greater autonomy in balancing the EU-driven initiatives with the domestic priorities. In China, the focus shifts towards national strategies, with less emphasis on the EU programs, reflecting the country's distinct internationalization trajectory. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan, where higher education systems have undergone reforms aligning with the Bologna Process, the IOPs have been instrumental in synthesizing the EU programs with national policies. In contrast, in China, where the higher education system differs markedly from the European model, the IOPs have primarily drawn inspiration from the EU programs.

All in all, in line with the findings, this dissertation suggests that empowering the IOPs through targeted professional development and increased institutional support could enhance the implementation and effectiveness of the EU higher education programs. By recognizing and strengthening the critical role of the IOPs, both the EU and participating countries can facilitate smoother policy transfers, overcome potential political and institutional barriers, and achieve more effective internationalization outcomes.

Having established these points, it is also necessary to re-visit the theoretical framework employed in the study and evaluate its explanatory value. The theoretical framework of this study is formed by the combined use of policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization theoretical frameworks. If this study had utilized only the policy transfer framework, the analysis would have primarily focused on the mechanisms, actors, and processes involved in the borrowing, adaptation, and application of EU higher education policies. While this would have provided valuable insights into the structural and procedural aspects of policy diffusion, it would not adequately address the role of domestic actors and contextual variations. The policy transfer framework is particularly effective in explaining how policies are transmitted between different levels and actors, including states and international organizations, but it lacks a detailed focus on the micro-level dynamics and the interpretative agency of local actors, such as the IOPs. On the other hand, employing only the bottom-up

Europeanization framework would have offered a deeper understanding of how domestic actors interpret, negotiate, and adapt EU policies within their specific institutional and national contexts. This approach emphasizes the agency of actors and the importance of informal networks, discourses, and domestic mediating factors. However, it does not sufficiently address the broader structural and cross-border mechanisms of policy transfer that extend beyond the EU's direct influence. Furthermore, relying solely on this framework would limit the analysis of non-EU contexts where Europeanization processes are less directly coercive and more reliant on voluntary alignment or emulation.

The decision to combine policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization frameworks was purposeful to address these gaps. While policy transfer offers insights into the structural and procedural aspects of policy diffusion, bottom-up Europeanization emphasizes the agency of local actors and the interpretive nature of policy adaptation. By integrating these two perspectives, the analysis captures both the broader policy processes and the micro-level dynamics within institutions, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how EU higher education programs are interpreted, adapted, and implemented across diverse contexts. This combined approach ensures that the complexities of a "soft" policy area like higher education, where the EU lacks binding authority, are thoroughly addressed.

It is also essential to highlight that there are other studies that integrate both theoretical frameworks in their analyses, although they are lesser in number. For instance, Yılmaz (2017) examines the integration of Europeanization and policy transfer frameworks in analyzing reforms in Turkish healthcare. Her findings emphasize the voluntary nature of policy transfer, particularly in EU candidate states like Türkiye. She concludes that policy transfer helps mitigate the risk of attributing domestic reforms solely to European influences by considering internal and external factors (Yılmaz, 2017). Similarly, Ladi (2007) compares the two frameworks, arguing that while Europeanization excels in contexts where the EU is a dominant actor, policy transfer is better suited for analyzing diffuse processes where no clear EU model exists (Ladi, 2007). Likewise, Howell (2002) who analyzes the influence of Europeanization on the UK financial services namely banking, investment and insurance directives

differentiates between vertical policy transfer (occurring through EU directives) and horizontal policy transfer (happening among states outside formal EU channels). These distinctions help to clarify how policy transfer complements Europeanization by extending its applicability beyond strictly EU-driven dynamics (Howell, 2004). Finally, Lenz (2006) applies the policy transfer framework developed by Dolowitz and Marsh to examine the EU's policy-making process in relation to Mercosur. His study investigates EU-Mercosur relations, illustrating how the EU leverages policy transfer to promote its governance models and encourage Europeanization in regions outside its membership. The research explores what the EU seeks to transfer, the roles played by the three main European institutions in this process, and the motivations and rationale behind such a strategy. Lenz's work emphasizes the external projection of EU practices and their adaptation within varying geopolitical contexts (Lenz, 2006).

In this respect, revisiting the theoretical framework in this conclusion, it is critical to indicate that the relevant theoretical frameworks have been explanatory in many aspects.

First of all, it should be reminded that Dolowitz and Marsh (1996; 2000) list nine different actor types, such as elected officials, bureaucrats, experts, and non-governmental organizations, and seven categories of transferrable elements (such as policy goals, structures, and instruments). The framework highlights the diverse and multi-level nature of policy transfer by highlighting the actors who influence and participate in this process. The framework's explanatory power with respect to the actor-centered dynamics at play in international higher education policy transfer is demonstrated by applying it to International Office Professionals and top-level university administrators, which elaborates on how different stakeholders affect adaptation and implementation.

Moreover, the policy transfer framework was useful for examining the dissemination of concepts, procedures, and regulations in various settings. Because it considers the actors, mechanisms, motivations, and results of policy transfer processes, it is appropriate for researching non-EU countries that implement EU higher education policies. For instance, policy transfer framework seeks to address *who is involved in*

transfer and *who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process.* In that respect, the findings suggest that while international officers (IOPs) operate under the authority of presidents or vice presidents—who serve as the primary decision-makers—these IOPs nonetheless exert substantial influence on both decision-making and the subsequent transfer of policies. This remains the case even though institutional structures vary widely, ranging from highly centralized to more decentralized configurations.

Similarly, a core aspect of Dolowitz and Marsh's (1996) policy transfer framework is understanding why actors engage in policy transfer. The findings reveal that although institutions highlight various motivations for participating in EU higher education programs, the most prominent—financial, institutional, and individual factors—indicate primarily voluntary engagement rather than direct pressure from national authorities. Still, some participants noted pressures to increase quantitative metrics and the indirect influence of international rankings. Dolowitz and Marsh's model thus helps in determining whether international offices act voluntarily, under explicit institutional coercion, or due to subtler external pressures.

As another illustration, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) identify various institutional and structural obstacles that can hinder policy transfer—ranging from ideological mismatches and structural incompatibilities to resource constraints, policy complexity, and technological limitations. Similarly, Evans (2009) categorizes barriers as either cognitive (e.g., limited pre-decision search or cultural assimilation) or environmental (e.g., insufficient policy networks, mobilization tactics, or resources). In this study, one objective was to determine if institutions encountered difficulties in implementing EU programs and, if so, how they addressed them. Applying the policy transfer framework, the analysis shows that most of the respondents primarily highlighted academic structural incompatibilities, including mismatched academic calendars, divergent credit and grading systems, and challenges with course recognition and language differences.

Lastly the policy transfer framework also demonstrates strong explanatory power by extending beyond EU-related developments. For instance, interviews suggest that the

establishment of international offices in Kazakhstan and China is not necessarily linked to EU-driven policies, and the internationalization strategies of Chinese institutions often emphasize regions like Southeast Asia rather than Europe. Consequently, Europeanization alone does not suffice to explain these diverse practices, particularly in non-EU contexts. As this dissertation focuses on three such countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the People's Republic of China—it requires a broader analytical lens. The policy transfer framework offers this added value by examining how policies are borrowed, adapted, and implemented across a wide range of geopolitical, socioeconomic, and institutional environments, including transfers not only from the EU, but also between countries and international organizations. In doing so, it captures a more comprehensive picture of the various channels and influences shaping domestic policy landscapes.

Overall, regarding the explanatory power of policy transfer framework, these examples of findings support the framework's relevance. However, it is critical to mention that policy transfer framework also has limitations in fully explaining the complexities observed in the study. The first limitation is about the nature of higher education which works in a field where rules, frameworks, and recommendations are generally non-binding, in contrast to policy areas that are subject to hard law. It is more difficult to define what is being transferred and how it can be implemented successfully because of its "soft" nature. For example, EU higher education policies like Erasmus and the Bologna Process depend on voluntary participation and local adaptation and lack enforceable mechanisms. How such non-coercive models are interpreted and modified in various contexts is difficult for the policy transfer framework to explain. The dynamics of voluntary alignment and selective adoption necessitate a more complex explanation than the framework offers, when there are no explicit mandates, as is the case in hard law domains. Similarly, policies pertaining to higher education frequently include abstract, general goals like promoting internationalization or raising standards of quality. It is challenging to specify the details of what is being transferred and how it should be operationalized because of this ambiguity. According to the interviews, institutions modified their credit and curriculum systems to conform to the EU standards, but domestic contexts,

institutional autonomy, and pre-existing frameworks influenced how these changes were implemented. These micro-level dynamics of adaptation and reinterpretation are not sufficiently addressed by policy transfer theory.

The lack of exclusive authority in this area further complicates the EU's role in higher education. Higher education is still a matter of national sovereignty, in contrast to areas where the EU has significant legislative authority. EU policies frequently function as recommendations rather than directives due to this lack of centralized authority, which naturally makes the transfer process more fragmented and context dependent. For example, in China, institutions mainly relied on their own interpretations of EU frameworks due to the absence of a clear and enforceable European model, which resulted in a variety of implementation outcomes. These informal and diffused processes are not well captured by policy transfer theory, which is centered on more structured mechanisms of transfer.

Moreover, the policy transfer framework developed by Dolowitz and Marsh is constrained in its ability to fully encompass the complex and dynamic realities observed in this study, largely due to its highly structured nature. Although the results offer a more nuanced picture, the framework's predetermined questions—such as "why transfer?" and "who is involved in the transfer?"—presume straightforward reactions. For example, despite not being official decision-makers, international office professionals use their knowledge and advisory skills to help shape and direct transfer processes. The policy transfer framework tends to concentrate on explicit actors and formal mechanisms of transfer, failing to sufficiently address this nuanced, indirect influence. Policy transfer is rarely a straight line, as evidenced by the function of institutional mechanisms and internal university dynamics, such as the interaction between International Offices and senior management.

On the other hand, similar to policy transfer framework, Europeanization as the second theoretical framework of the study has significant explanatory power in several aspects. First of all, due to its emphasis on the actors rather than top-down EU-centered pressures, bottom-up Europeanization enables an actor-centered approach, which is adopted in this study by elaborating the IOPs' perception and understanding as well as

their role in institutional and national decision making. Bottom-up Europeanization shifts the analytical lens from the EU-centered pressures and top-down harmonization to the understandings, motivations, and agency of local stakeholders—university administrators, faculty, staff, and in this case, the IOPs. It shows that policies are not simply adopted or rejected wholesale; rather, they are actively interpreted, negotiated, and reframed by those working closest to the ground. The qualitative data reveal instances where the interviewed IOPs have initiated changes and influenced upper-level decisions, demonstrating bottom-up dynamics.

Moreover, the mediating factors included in the Europeanization framework point out to different factors such as the existence of veto players and adequate institutions and capacity (e.g. financial resources) to identify causal interferences. For instance, the qualitative data suggest that faculty, in some cases, refrain from fully endorsing new policies due to time constraints, perceptions of increased workload, or doubts regarding the legitimacy of such initiatives—thus positioning themselves as de facto veto players. Similarly, the existence of adequate financial resources emerges as a critical element. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the absence of governmental financial support and reliance on the EU or external funds were explicitly noted, while participants from Kazakhstan acknowledged the importance of national government scholarships. Conversely, although China invests heavily in higher education and provides substantial international student grants, the participants scarcely mentioned these resources. Overall, these findings confirm that multiple mediating factors—ranging from domestic veto players and institutional elites to resource availability—are central to understanding variation in domestic change induced by the EU policies. This aligns with the broader Europeanization literature, which underscores that whether an existing misfit leads to substantial domestic transformation depends not only on the presence of top-down pressures, but also on additional variables such as domestic power centers/veto players, institutional configurations, and resource endowments (Börzel & Risse, 2000; 2003).

However, similar to policy transfer framework, bottom-up Europeanization also has certain limitations in fully explaining the complexities observed in the study. The fact that higher education is primarily regulated by soft law mechanisms and the EU's lack

of exclusive authority in this policy field complicate the analysis, making it harder to track the EU-induced changes compared to hard-law areas.

Moreover, the framework's emphasis on the EU-induced changes—which presumes that the EU is the main force behind domestic transformation—is another important hindrance. Although this method might work well for examining member states or candidate countries, it is more difficult to apply to non-EU countries like China and Kazakhstan. In these situations, internationalization initiatives are frequently motivated by national priorities, regional alliances, or worldwide trends rather than by European models. As an illustration of how Europeanization is not a driving force in these situations, China's internationalization efforts have been primarily driven by factors independent of the EU, such as its global opening-up policies (or its policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Double First-Class University structure etc.) and strategic focus on alternative regions such as Southeast Asia. Hence, the analysis shows that global and regional trends, as well as national priorities, are frequently incorporated into higher education reforms in non-EU countries. For this reason, the policy transfer framework, which examines how policies are borrowed, adapted, and implemented across diverse legal contexts beyond the EU framework, is sought in this study alongside Europeanization, proving to be a valuable analytical tool.

At that point, it would be illustrative to present the completed policy transfer framework, previously introduced in its unfilled form, now filled in with insights derived from the qualitative data, as visualized in the figure below.

As illustrated in the Figure 7.2. above, the inquiry of "*Why Transfer?"* was thoroughly examined to discern the motivations behind participation. Findings from the analysis of the qualitative data indicate that the interviewed institutions and IOPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and China got engaged with the EU programs primarily due to voluntary motivations, notably financial incentives, institutional capacity-building, and international visibility. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, an additional layer of mixed motivations emerged, influenced by the EU accession process that combined voluntary participation with external pressures.

Why Transfer Continuum ?			Who is Involved in Transfer ?	What is Transferred ?	From Where ?		Degrees of Transfer	Constraints on Transfer	How to Demonstrate Policy Transfer ?	How Transfer Leads to Policy Failure ?
Voluntary	**Mixtures**	**Coercive**			**Within the Country**	**Cross-National**				
Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and China demonstrated voluntary engagement with the EU programs as part of their internationalization strategies. Financial motivations, institutional and individual motivations were primary drivers.	Some institutions, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, indicated mixed motivations—both wanting to align with EU standards and feeling pressured due to the EU accession processes.	Coercion was not a significant factor in the non-EU contexts examined, although the influence of international rankings on HEIs is framed as an indirect pressure.	International Office Professionals (IOPs): Key mediators and implementers, University administrators and rectors: Decision-makers supporting strategic alignment, National authorities.	Goals: Harmonization with the EU higher education standards (e.g., Bologna Process goals), Content: Curriculum updates, credit systems, and mobility programs (Erasmus+), Instruments: Tools for quality assurance, program development, and funding mechanisms.	Collaboration and horizontal policy learning/network among the IOPs within the same country.	EU, Non-EU international influences, Other regional actors,	Synthesis (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kazakhstan), Inspiration (China).	Academic misalignments, Inter-institutional communication, Legal and bureucratic difficulties (country-specific).	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE

Figure 7.2 Complementary Application of Policy Transfer Framework and Bottom-Up Europeanization (*Processed*).

Furthermore, international rankings and competition among the HEIs exerted indirect coercive pressure, although direct coercion was not a significant factor in the higher education sector. The bottom-up Europeanization perspective enriched this analysis by highlighting the IOPs as the principal actors and emphasizing the voluntary nature of their engagement, particularly given the EU's reliance on soft mechanisms (e.g., persuasion, benchmarks) in higher education—a domain characterized by the absence of coercive enforcement.

Secondly, the exploration of *"Who is Involved in Transfer"* underscored the pivotal role of the IOPs in the process. These professionals emerged as key agents, facilitating mediation, implementation, and advisory functions. Their expertise and strategic positions were instrumental in navigating the interplay among the institutional, national, and EU dynamics, even though the university administrators and national authorities were identified as primary decision-makers. The bottom-up Europeanization framework further deepened this analysis by emphasizing the agency of the IOPs and their intermediary roles within institutional hierarchies and across various levels (intra-university, national, EU).

Moreover, addressing *"What is Transferred?"* revealed that the EU higher education programs and tools were the primary elements transferred, encompassing curriculum updates, credit systems, and mobility schemes such as Erasmus+. The analysis highlighted the adaptation of these components to align with local contexts. Given the study's focus on the EU higher education programs, the Europeanization perspective was inherently integrated into the analysis. Additionally, the consideration of *"From Where?"* was essential in mapping the origins of the transfer. In the cross-national context, the EU emerged as the principal source of policy transfer, with additional influences from other regional and international actors. Notably, the analysis of the qualitative data indicated that international offices predominantly maintained collaborative relationships and were engaged in horizontal policy learning and networking with other international offices within their respective countries.

Furthermore, in the context of policy transfer, the *"Degrees of Transfer"* dimension examines the extent to which policies are adopted by different countries or institutions.

This spectrum ranges from direct copying to mere inspiration. In the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and China, varying degrees of transfer are evident, influenced by factors such as the Bologna Process and the distinct characteristics of each higher education system. Both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan seem to engage in a synthesis approach to policy transfer. This involves integrating elements of the EU higher education policies into their systems, while adapting them to fit into the national and institutional contexts. The Bologna Process has played a significant role in this integration, promoting compatibility and comparability within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). However, these countries have not adopted EU policies directly; instead, they have reinterpreted and modified them to align with the local needs and constraints. In contrast, China's engagement with the EU higher education policies can be characterized as inspiration. The substantial differences between the Chinese and European higher education systems have limited the direct applicability of EU policies in China. Consequently, China has selectively drawn inspiration from certain aspects of the EU initiatives, without implementing major structural changes.

Besides, the inquiry of *"Constraints on Transfer"* was essential for identifying the challenges encountered during the policy transfer process. The qualitative data indicated that academic misalignments, as well as structural and institutional constraints—such as governance complexities, resource limitations, and inter-institutional communication gaps—served as significant impediments to effective transfer. The bottom-up Europeanization perspective enriched the understanding by providing tools to analyze mediating factors, such as veto players and the necessity of local adaptations by domestic actors due to these constraints of policy transfer. Hence policy transfer framework helps identify these constraints, while bottom-up Europeanization offers tools to analyze how local actors navigate and mitigate these challenges.

On the other hand, the dimensions *"How to Demonstrate Policy Transfer"* and *"How Transfer Leads to Policy Failure"* were not adopted in this study due to their evaluative nature, which extends beyond the primary focus of this research. The study concentrates on understanding the processes, perceptions, and roles of the

International Office Professionals (IOPs) in facilitating and mediating the EU higher education programs within their specific contexts, rather than on assessing the outcomes or broader implications of these transfers in terms of failure or success. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of micro-level dynamics and actor strategies rather than making generalized claims about the policy transfer's success or demonstrating its outcomes in a structured manner. These dimensions require a different methodological approach and a focus on policy outcomes, which fall beyond the scope of this research.

Hence, integrating the interview findings into Dolowitz and Marsh's policy transfer framework, supplemented by the bottom-up Europeanization, provided a comprehensive understanding of how the EU higher education policies were interpreted, adapted, and implemented across diverse national contexts. This combined approach highlights the significance of both structural frameworks and the agency of local actors in the policy transfer process.

While concluding the discussion of theory re-visit, my claim would be that these two theories also seem applicable in other country contexts, beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan, People’s Republic of China, where meaningful results could still be obtained, but with some differences. Integration of policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization conceptual frameworks, as well as the focus on actor-centered perspectives (particularly IOPs), is not necessarily limited to the three cases initially examined. The premise that practices and policies have their roots in one political and cultural space (the EU) can be transferred, modified, and reinterpreted in another—has conceptual relevance in a variety of contexts. It is universally relevant to emphasize domestic actors, institutional contexts, and the interaction between local agency and global (or regional) pressures. International frameworks, funding opportunities, and external policy models are encountered by institutions across different countries. Hence, this dynamic is not specific to the three countries under investigation.

Furthermore, when researching other country cases, the useful knowledge gathered from this study—for example, how International Office Professionals understand and

negotiate EU higher education programs or how domestic structures mediate external influences—can provide important direction. The results obtained from the three cases may actually be supported, improved, or refuted by using a similar analytical framework in a different setting. The theoretical framework would be more broadly applicable if a different country with a different political system, cultural background, degree of economic development, or relationship to the EU showed comparable patterns of policy interpretation and adaptation.

However, contextualization proves to be necessary for meaningful results. Although theoretical frameworks are transferable, the local circumstances that influence the results of policy are very different. This research shows that how well these theories explain observed outcomes depends on a number of factors, including a country's historical ties to Europe, level of openness to international educational systems, administrative capacity, higher education governance structures, language policies, and sociocultural values surrounding education. Researchers must carefully reinterpret their theoretical tools and consider whether the conditions that previously allowed for meaningful insights are still present in the new context, which can vary in the original three countries. Nevertheless, this thorough investigation has still led me to argue that the conceptual toolkit is adaptable enough to be used in other contexts.

In addition to discussing the theoretical frameworks' limitations, it would be helpful to address the study's overall constraints in the conclusion. The study examined differences in the perceptions and implementations of EU higher education policies in three different country contexts: the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results cannot be readily generalized to other countries or regions, even though these cases were specifically chosen to reflect various geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural circumstances. Every setting has distinct governance systems, higher education traditions, and historical legacies that could produce different results in other places.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the important insights obtained from practitioners who operationalize EU higher education initiatives at the institutional level by putting International Office Professionals (IOPs) at the center of the analysis. The viewpoints

of other important stakeholders, including teaching staff, students, rectors, legislative bodies, and employers, were not studied in depth, though, because of this actor-focused design. By incorporating these perspectives, a more comprehensive understanding of the processes of policy transfer and Europeanization may be possible, possibly exposing new dynamics or sources of resistance and influence.

Furthermore, in order to gather detailed, contextualized information that is hard to get from surveys or historical documents, the study employed semi-structured interviews. For this reason, subjectivity is introduced even though this qualitative method provides depth and interpretive richness. Individual interpretations, institutional interests, and roles all affect the participants' answers which might be biased or only partially reflect the processes under study.

Additionally, since the data for the study was gathered over a specific period of time, it offers a snapshot of policy adaptation and Europeanization rather than a long-term perspective. The processes of internationalization and policy transfer frequently develop over years or even decades, impacted by shifting institutional reforms, political priorities, and economic circumstances. Observing how policies, practices, and attitudes change over time through a longitudinal approach or frequent follow-ups would provide additional insight into the sustainability, gradual modifications, or reversals in the adoption of EU higher education frameworks. For example, if the interviews were to be repeated in the event of the EU membership being approved, the response from Bosnian participants would probably be different.

Lastly, it should be noted that significant internal heterogeneity exists even among the three countries under investigation; differences in institutional cultures, regional disparities, and university governance models cannot all be adequately represented in a small number of interviews. Moreover, the lack of a systematic comparison across different types of institutions—such as public versus private universities or research-intensive versus teaching-focused entities—may affect the generalizability of the findings. The study's ability to accurately depict the complexity of higher education environments in each country may be limited by this internal diversity.

Finally, I would like to conclude this dissertation by highlighting the original contributions of the study and my suggestions for future studies and research. However, to better elaborate on the findings of this study and its contributions to the literature, an examination of the results from previous studies utilizing policy transfer and Europeanization frameworks in the field of higher education as well as studies focusing on the IOPs is also essential.

Firstly, when we examine the studies that utilize same theoretical frameworks and yield findings similar to this dissertation highlighting the interplay between individual agency and structural factors, the findings of Yang (2023) reveal that both structural conditions and the actions of key individuals significantly influenced the adaptation and implementation of foreign educational models in China (Yang, 2023), which is in line with the emphasis of this dissertation on the IOPs as key actors. Likewise, the study of Veiga (2010) analyzing the Bologna Process at the local level reveals that the Europeanization of higher education is a multifaceted process and emphasizes the significance of national and institutional factors in shaping the outcomes of European policies, highlighting the complex interplay between European directives and local practices, similar to this dissertation's emphasis on domestic, institutional and national contexts (Veiga, 2010). Another study that emphasizes institutional and national contexts is the study of Dobbins (2017), which examines the higher education reform complexities of France and Italy, both of which were pivotal in initiating the Bologna Process and concludes that historical legacies and institutional contexts play crucial roles in shaping how Europeanization processes manifest in national higher education systems (Dobbins, 2017). Similarly, Vukasovic (2013) highlights the role of domestic actors, veto players, and institutional capacity in mediating processes in higher education, noting that compliance is often context-specific and influenced by internal dynamics. Additionally, Mercille and Murphy (2015) and Spanke (2017) underline the transformative impact of the Bologna Process on national higher education systems, particularly in terms of structural reforms and quality assurance, but also stress the limitations imposed by national contexts.

Overall, while Europeanization fosters a degree of alignment, these studies demonstrate that higher education policies remain deeply embedded in domestic

political, cultural, and institutional frameworks, resulting in varied adaptations and outcomes across states. These findings reflect the nuanced interplay of global, regional, and local dynamics in the field of higher education. Hence, despite these Europeanization efforts, findings indicate persistent diversity in policy outcomes and instruments, with convergence seen more in rhetoric and objectives than implementation. In that regard, the studies discussed above share commonalities with this dissertation in their focus on Europeanization and policy transfer as analytical frameworks to explore the dissemination and adaptation of EU policies across diverse geopolitical contexts. Moreover, similar to my research, these studies emphasize the importance of domestic and institutional contexts, highlighting how local actors navigate, adapt, or resist external influences, such as EU policies. These parallels resonate with my research's findings, which examine how the IOPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Kazakhstan and People's Republic of China engage with EU higher education initiatives within their peculiar national and institutional settings.

On the other hand, when examining studies focused on the IOPs, it becomes evident that research in this area is relatively scarce. There are limited number of studies analyzing international relations offices (Wächter, 2008; De Wit, 2011, Vural Yılmaz 2017; Garcia et.al., 2021; Bulut Şahin, 2023). With its focus on the IOPs, the study of Bulut Şahin et al. (2023) represents one of the rare examples within the body of research focusing on the EU countries; however, its findings differ from those of this dissertation. The study of Bulut Şahin et.al (2023) focuses on the significance of including the IOPs in strategic planning to enhance the effectiveness of internationalization efforts, through a qualitative approach of 23 semi-structured interviews with the IOPs from European and Turkish universities. The study reveals that the IOPs are often not sufficiently involved in the strategic planning processes of their institutions, despite their expertise and frontline experience in internationalization (Bulut Şahin et.al., 2023). In contrast, the findings of this dissertation suggest a more influential role for the IOPs, both within institutional decision-making and, to some extent, in the national context. The interviews conducted for my research indicate that the IOPs are not only integral to the implementation of internationalization strategies but also actively mediate between

institutional administration and external stakeholders, thereby shaping decisions and policies at multiple levels. Moreover, while both studies shed light on the roles and challenges faced by the IOPs in higher education internationalization, this dissertation distinguishes itself through its focus which extends beyond the European context to include non-EU countries and this broader scope allows for a comparative analysis of how the IOPs operate within diverse political, economic, and cultural environments, offering a more global perspective on internationalization processes.

Hence, considering the studies mentioned above, this dissertation diverges in several ways and adds a number of noteworthy entries, in the areas of bottom-up Europeanization, policy transfer, internationalization of higher education, particularly in relation the EU-funded educational initiatives and Erasmus program.

First of all, the study adds conceptual and empirical depth to existing literature by reorienting the analytical focus to non-EU contexts and to particular institutional actors, namely International Office Professionals (IOPs). Although bottom-up Europeanization has gained popularity as a conceptual framework to explain institutional intermediaries and domestic agency (Börzel & Risse, 2000; Jacquot & Woll, 2003), empirical applications in the majority of studies have frequently been restricted to the EU member states or close neighbors. This study shows that the explanatory richness of both policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization can go well beyond the boundaries of the Union by looking at three non-EU countries with different political, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Similarly, the majority of studies on the EU higher education programs and Erasmus have traditionally been carried out in European settings, frequently examining the effects on the language skills, employability, and development of European identities of student participants (Teichler, 2004; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Kinginger, 2009). These studies largely concentrate on outcomes associated with mobility experiences within the EU, such as improved labor market prospects, intercultural competencies, and language acquisition. Outside of the EU on the other hand, scholarly attention has mostly been focused on top-down analyses. These consist of macro-level research or reports from the European Commission on the impact of EU-funded initiatives such

as Tempus on structural changes in national higher education systems (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000; European Commission, various years). The micro-level, actor-centered processes that analyze how and to what degree international programs are integrated into institutional procedures are less clear from these sources, despite the fact that they offer useful summaries. There is still a need of empirical data specifically addressing the personnel in charge of operationalizing these programs, especially those in non-EU countries. The few studies analyzing staff perspectives frequently focus on internal administrative experiences and are conducted within European borders (e.g. Wächter, 2008; De Wit, 2011; Bulut Şahin et. al., 2023). However, the contributions that examine how international offices of non-EU universities understand, apply, or modify EU initiatives for their own contexts are relatively rare. Thus, this dissertation addresses a gap in the internationalization literature by focusing on the IOPs in non-EU countries.

Lastly, a noteworthy contribution of this research is its specific focus on the IOPs as important intermediary in the processes of internationalization and policy transfer. Limited research has been done on international offices, and most of it focuses on administrative duties, internal management procedures, or more general institutional policies without exploring how these offices act as a mediator between local contexts and external policy frameworks (see, for example, Şahin et.al., 2023; de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011) and primarily addressing European cases. Even fewer studies have been conducted on the active interpretation, modification, and legitimization of the EU-related programs by the IOPs in non-EU countries. This dissertation positions the IOPs as significant policy actors by methodically examining their perceptions and their embeddedness in national and institutional structures. Hence, this adds a new perspective to the internationalization and policy transfer literatures by broadening the understanding of international offices from solely administrative units to agents of policy interpretation and adaptation, especially in non-European context.

Overall, this dissertation enhances the literature by addressing underexplored aspects of policy transfer and Europeanization. It expands the geographical scope to include non-EU countries with differing levels of integration with the EU; introduces a micro-

level perspective by focusing on the agency of the IOPs, which is less emphasized in existing research; highlights the complexity of soft policy transfer, where institutional autonomy, local contexts, and limited EU authority create unique adaptation challenges and lastly bridges theoretical gaps by combining policy transfer and Europeanization frameworks to analyze their applicability in non-EU contexts. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that no existing study appears to compare the higher education practices of these three countries within a single comprehensive framework. Likewise, there seems to be an absence of research specifically focusing on international office professionals in these three countries and systematically comparing their roles and outcomes.

Building on the findings and constraints noted in this study, future research could explore a number of topics that could improve our comprehension of Europeanization, policy transfer, and the functions of domestic actors in higher education systems.

First of all, although the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were the main subjects of this study, other countries with different histories, geopolitical locations, or cultural norms might be the subject of future investigations. Determining whether and how policy transfer and bottom-up Europeanization function under different political, economic, and social circumstances may be facilitated by applying the same theoretical frameworks in areas like the Middle East, Latin America, or Sub-Saharan Africa. Such research would also evaluate these theories' applicability and peculiarity outside of the initial contexts they were studied in.

Moreover, it is also understood from the interviews that the global COVID-19 pandemic has had a big impact on higher education, as it did in many other fields. In that regard, future studies could specifically look into how pandemic-related issues have impacted the functioning, attractiveness, and execution of the EU higher education programs, especially in countries like China, which was the center of COVID-19. These studies could look at how mobility patterns have changed, how educational offerings have gone digital, how partnership priorities have altered, and

how resilient and flexible institutional internationalization strategies are over the long run.

Furthermore, this study emphasized the important role that international office professionals play as intermediary by highlighting their perspectives. The actors involved could be expanded in future studies to include students, faculty, university administration, legislative bodies, and external stakeholders (e.g., employers, accreditation agencies, NGOs). The researcher could better understand bottom-up Europeanization and uncover new forms of agency and resistance by looking at how various group's view, impact, and react to policy transfer processes.

Lastly, although qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews provided detailed information, mixed-methods designs might be advantageous for subsequent research. Qualitative findings could be supplemented by quantitative surveys, social network analyses, or bibliometric reviews of project reports and policy documents. This kind of methodological pluralism would measure the degree of policy adaptation over time, show correlations between institutional traits and successful policy integration, and offer more convincing evidence of patterns of policy diffusion.

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APPENDICES

A. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION FORM

Purpose of the Study:

This PhD dissertation is being prepared by Lect. Burcu Akpınar, PhD student in METU Department of Political Science and Public Administration, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Asuman Göksel, faculty member in METU Political Science and Public Administration department. This form has been created to provide you with information about the research conditions.

This dissertation aims to understand the local dynamics of higher education institutions in Bosnia, China and Kazakhstan in the context of Europeanization through a bottom-up perspective. The purpose of this research is to investigate the perspectives, understandings and responses of international Office Professionals in higher education institutions and how these institutions' professional and educational practices have been impacted by Europeanization.

Procedure:

You will be requested to participate in an online and structured interview as a participant. The interview is scheduled to last roughly 40 minutes and will comprise of a set of inquiries concerning your viewpoints and experiences regarding the EU-induced programs and policies implemented in your institutions. To ensure accuracy in data collection and analysis, the interview will be recorded.

Voluntary Participation:

Your involvement in this research is completely voluntary. You will not face any repercussions if you decide to drop out of the study at any point or decide not to participate. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Middle East Technical University or any other entity.

Confidentiality:

All data gathered in the course of the interview will be kept confidential. Your answers will be made anonymous and any personally identifiable information will be eliminated or substituted. Only the researcher and authorized staff will have access to the securely stored data.

Risks:

There are no anticipated risks related to taking part in this research.

Contact Information:

Please get in touch with Lecturer/PhD (c.) if you have any questions about this study or your participation.

Consent:

By signing below, you voluntarily agree to participate in this study and attest that you have read and comprehended the information provided above.

Participant's Name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

B. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Personal Information:

1. Country
2. Nationality
3. Name of the Institution
4. Age
5. Gender
6. Department/Unit
7. Title
8. Seniority [year of service in the field of internationalization; how long have you been working in your current position?]

2) Questions About the International Office, the Institution and Their Relations:

1. What is the type of your institution (public or private?) and when was it founded?
2. Could you please describe the general structure and composition of your International Office, in your institution?
    a. How long has your institution been engaged in international higher education initiatives?
    b. When and how your office was established?
    c. What are the main responsibilities and duties carried out by your International Office? [Daily/weekly routine/workload and the task description of the office; if the description of your office duties and/or job divisions is available in a written format in any website or legal document, could you please share it?]
    d. What kind of turning points [*e.g., did it start with the Tempus, for instance*] did your International Office experience, with regard to the internationalization activities? [*institutional development of the office]*
    e. How do you think you differ from other administrative units of the university, with regards to the duties and responsibilities? [*for example, from the Student Affairs Office?*] Can you give some examples?
3. How would you describe your office's relationship with the University administration with regards to the decisions and implementations of internationalization and the EU higher education programs?

4. Do you have any relations with the other International Offices of other universities in your country? If yes, can you describe your relationship with them? [*Any networks, daily contacts, cooperative or competitive? etc*.]

3) Understanding and Perception of the EU-induced Higher Education Programs:

1. Does your university have an internationalization strategy? If yes, what does it encompass?
    a. Is it a part of a national strategy or your institution's own strategy?
2. What kind of a role do the EU programs play in your university's internationalization strategy?
    a. Are they a part of your institution's strategic planning? For how long?
    b. Could you please explain the motivations behind your institution's involvement in EU higher education programs? [e.g. financial, cultural, social, political etc.; for example, it might be because of the financial support that the programs offer for beneficiaries?]
    c. How do they play a role in your office's international activities?

4) Transfer and Adaptation of Policies in Their Distinctive Domestic and Institutional Contexts:

1. Is there a national strategy in terms of the EU higher education programs in your country? If yes,
    a. Who are the national actors of that strategy? [*decision-makers*]
    b. Where do you see your office and your institution in this strategy?

    [Do you feel a pressure coming from the EU itself or your national government, international authorities, rankings etc. for being part of these programs? Or, is it the HEIs themselves that force the governments to be more internationalized and Europeanized?]
2. What part, in your opinion, does the International Office play in the transfer of these policies?
    a. Do you feel a pressure coming from your university administration for being part and effectively implementing these programs? If yes, how?
    b. To what extent can your office influence intermediate or upper-level decision-making processes within your institution?
3. Can you share examples of instances where your office has successfully influenced policy or decision-making at higher levels (*university administration, national and regional authorities such as Ministry, Higher Education Council and the EU bodies*), with regard to the transfer of EU higher education programs and related mechanisms? [*e.g. official documents/regulations; curriculum; institutional structure etc.; For example,*

can you encourage the adoption of a senate resolution and get it accepted by the administration? How autonomous do you feel in this sense?]

5) Implementation/Execution of the EU-Higher Education Programs and Policies:

1. How do you implement/execute the EU higher education programs?
    a. In what ways have these policies been modified to suit your institution's particular domestic context? Can you provide examples of how these programs are adapted to fit your domestic and institutional context? [*For example: is it possible for you to receive and apply the EU higher education programs directly, or do you adapt them through your own national and institutional filters? official documents/regulations; curriculum; institutional changes etc*.]
2. What kind of legal and institutional difficulties and/or problems about the implementation of the programs in practice [*institution, students, staff etc*.] has your organization encountered when putting EU higher education program policies into practice [*e.g. uncertainties in legal regulations*]?
    a. If you have experienced any, have these problems been overcome? If so, did the solution come from within the institution itself or from the EU/government?
    b. How have your institution's administration, faculty and students reacted to the changes induced by the EU higher education programs?

6) Final Thoughts

1. If there is any report that you prepared or internal document of the institution with regard to your office's/institution's implementation of the EU higher education programs, could you share them with me?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with EU higher education programs or your role as an International Office Professional?

C. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

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13 EYLÜL 2024

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Doç. Dr. Asuman Göksel

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Burcu Akpınar'ın ***"Why Non-Member States Become Part of the EU Higher Education Programs? An Analysis with Three Selected Countries with the Perspectives of Policy Transfer and Europeanization"*** başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek **0452-ODTUİAEK-2024** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN
Başkan

Prof.Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK
Üye

Doç. Dr. Ali Emre Turgut
Üye

Doç. Dr. Şerife SEVİNÇ
Üye

Doç.Dr. Murat Perit ÇAKIR
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Süreyya ÖZCAN KABASAKAL
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ
Üye

E. CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

First Name(s) / Surname(s): Burcu Akpınar

Date of Birth: -

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

2015-2025	Middle East Technical University, Ankara Türkiye
PhD Degree	Political Science and Public Administration, GPA: 3,88/4,00
Thesis Title:	Transferring EU Higher Education Programs: The Role of International Office Professionals in Third Countries
Thesis Advisor:	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Asuman Göksel
2014-2018	Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye
Master's Degree	European Studies, GPA: 3,86/4,00
Thesis Title:	The Impact of EU-Funded Student Exchange Programmes on the EU Information Deficit
Thesis Advisor:	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sevilay Kahraman
2012-2016	Yıldız Teknik University, Istanbul, Türkiye
Master's Degree	Political Science and International Relations, GPA: 3,93/4,00
Thesis Title:	AKP Hükümetlerinin Dış Politika Söylem ve Pratiği: İnşacı Perspektiften Bir Analiz
Thesis Advisor:	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fuat Aksu
2007-2012	Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye
Bachelor's Degree	International Relations, GPA: 3,70/4,00
2010-2012	Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye
Minor Degree	Political Science and Public Administration
2012	Sciences Po L'Institut d'etudes politiques, Paris, France
	Erasmus Program
2003-2007	Vefa High School, Istanbul, Türkiye

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

2024-continues Lecturer (since 2019), International Cooperation Office Director, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

2015-2019 Research Assistant, Overseas Mobility Program Coordinator, International Cooperation Office, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

2014-2015 Project Assistant, International Cooperation Office, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

2013-2014 Research Assistant, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul Gelisim University, Istanbul, Türkiye

2013-2013 International Programs Specialist, External Relations Office, Istanbul Gelisim University, Istanbul, Türkiye

2010-2012 Student Assistant, International Cooperation Office, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

2011 Internship, Amnesty International Ankara Branch

2010-2011 Internship, Middle East Strategic Research Center (ORSAM)

2010 Internship, Cultural and Tourism Ministry of Turkish Republic

LANGUAGES & OTHER COMPETENCES

Mother Tongue Turkish

Other Languages English (Advanced-C1 Proficient User)

Russian (A1 Basic User)

Other Competences Competent with all Microsoft operating systems and office programs

CONFERENCE PUBLICATIONS

"Erasmus+ Programs and Their Impact on the Participants' Information and Awareness of the EU", Akpınar, B., *18th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, Valencia, Spain, 4-6 March 2024, pp.4288-4294.

"Expansion of the Erasmus+ Programs in Non-EU Countries and Challenges: Integration of Participants Coming from Conflicting Countries", Akpınar, B., Teksöz, G., *18th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, Valencia, Spain, 4-6 March 2024, pp.4282-4286.

F. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Çalışmanın Amacı ve Teorik Çerçevesi

Avrupa Birliği (AB), yükseköğretim alanında açık bir yetkinliği olmasa da küreselleşme ve iletişim teknolojilerinin gelişmesinin de etkisiyle yükseköğretim politikalarını şekillendirmede kritik bir aktör olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Tempus, Erasmus vb. programlar aracılığıyla AB, yalnızca üye devletlerini etkilemekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda etkisini AB dışındaki ülkelere de genişletmiş ve Avrupa girişimleri ve standartlarının benimsenmesini teşvik etmiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu tezde sunulan araştırma, seçilen ve AB üyesi olmayan üç ülkenin yükseköğretim kurumlarında çalışan Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonellerinin (UOP), AB yükseköğretim programları ve politikalarını, kendi özgün yerel ve kurumsal bağlamlarında nasıl algıladıkları, yorumladıkları ve uyguladıkları ile AB programları ile ilgili kurumsal ve ulusal düzeydeki karar alma süreçlerini ne ölçüde etkileyebildikleri konusunda kapsamlı bir anlayış sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, her biri farklı kurumsal ve toplumsal bağlamlara ve AB ile farklı ilişki türlerine sahip olan Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti olmak üzere AB üyesi olmayan üç ülkeye ve bu ülkelerdeki UOP'e odaklanmaktadır.

Çalışmanın teorik arka planı ise politika transferi ve aşağıdan yukarıya Avrupalılaşma (bottom-up Europeanization) perspektiflerinin bir arada kullanıldığı ikili bir teorik çerçeveden oluşmaktadır. Dolowitz ve Marsh (1996; 2000) tarafından formüle edilen politika transferi çerçevesi, çeşitli kurumsal ve yasal bağlamlardaki politikaların ödünç alınmasını, uyarlanmasını ve uygulanmasını anlamak için yapılandırılmış bir yöntem sunar. Bu çerçeve, transfer sürecine dahil olan aktörler, transferin nedenleri ve transfer sürecinde karşılaşılan zorluklar gibi önemli bileşenleri vurgular. Yükseköğretim alanında ise politika transferi, AB üyesi olmayan ülkelerin Avrupa politikalarını kendi

farklı eğitim yapıları ve bağlamlarına uyacak şekilde nasıl adapte ettiklerini ve ne tür filtrelerden geçirerek nasıl dönüştürdüklerini anlamak bakımından kritiktir.

Ayrıca, özellikle yükseköğretim kurumlarındaki yerel aktörlerin AB politikalarını nasıl anladıkları, bunlara nasıl tepki verdikleri ve bu aktörlerin kurumsal ve ulusal düzeydeki karar süreçlerine ne ölçüde etki edebildiklerine vurgu yapan bu tez, Avrupalılaşmanın teorik çerçevesini aşağıdan yukarıya sosyolojik kurumsalcı bir bakış açısıyla da inceler. Yerel aktörlerin faaliyetine ve bağlamsal faktörlerin etkisine güçlü bir vurgu yapan aşağıdan yukarıya Avrupalılaşma, Avrupalılaşmayı AB normlarının tek yönlü dayatılması olarak gören yukarıdan aşağıya yaklaşımlardan daha farklı bir bakış açısı benimser. Dolayısıyla bu çerçeve, UOP'ni de kendi kurumları içindeki kritik aracılar olarak vurgulayarak, politika transferinin yapılandırılmış yöntemine daha karmaşık, aktör merkezli bir analiz ekler.

Bu bağlamda, politika transferi çerçevesinden, transfer mekanizmalarına (örneğin gönüllü, zorlayıcı veya karma), dahil olan aktörlere (örneğin uluslararası ofis profesyonelleri, kurumsal yöneticiler, ulusal otoriteler) ve transfer üzerindeki kısıtlamalara (örneğin yapısal veya kurumsal zorluklar) odaklanan yönler oldukça açıklayıcı bulunmuş ve bu çalışma kapsamında benimsenmiştir. Aşağıdan yukarıya Avrupalılaşma çerçevesinin ise aktör merkezli yaklaşımlara ve yerel ve Avrupa bağlamları arasındaki etkileşime odaklanması oldukça uygulanabilir ve açıklayıcıdır. Ancak Avrupalılaşma çerçevesinin, seçilen ülkelerin (örneğin Çin) ne ölçüde "Avrupalılaştığını" değerlendirmek veya ölçmek için seçilmediğini belirtmek önemlidir. Bunun yerine, görüşmelerden elde edilen bulguları yorumlamak ve AB programlarının incelenen ülkelerin belirli bağlamlarında nasıl algılandığını ve aracılık edildiğini daha iyi anlamak için açıklayıcı bir araç olarak benimsenmiştir.

Dolayısıyla, bu tez, kendisini bu iki çerçeve arasında konumlandırarak, her ikisinin de aktarılabilir unsurlarını entegre ederken aynı zamanda sınırlamalarını da ele alan hibrit ve ayırt edici bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. Dolowitz ve Marsh (1996, 2000) tarafından geliştirilen politika transferi çerçevesi, transfer süreçlerini analiz etmek için yapılandırılmış bir yaklaşım sunmakta ve uygulanabilirliğini AB'nin üye devletler üzerindeki etkisinin ötesine taşımaktadır. Benzer şekilde, aşağıdan yukarıya

Avrupalılaşma, aktörler ve yerel dinamiklere vurgu yapması, veto oyuncuları gibi aracı değişkenleri dahil etme yeteneği, görüşmelerin bulgularını açıklaması ve çalışmanın AB yüksek öğrenim programlarına odaklanması nedeniyle seçilmiştir. Bu çerçeveler birlikte, farklı ulusal ve kurumsal bağlamlarda AB politikaları ve kurumsal uygulamalar arasındaki etkileşimi keşfetmek için kapsamlı ve açıklayıcı bir analitik araç sağlamıştır.

Sonuç olarak tekrar etmek gerekirse bu çalışma, temel analiz birimi olarak UOP'ne odaklanarak, yükseköğretimde politika transferi ve Avrupalılaşmanın karmaşık süreçlerini aşağıdan yukarıya bir bakış açısıyla anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu kapsamda, bu çalışma aşağıdaki araştırma sorularını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır:

1. Analizin temel birimi olarak UOP, ara veya üst düzeydeki karar alıcı aktörleri etkileyebilir mi? Bu anlamda, UOP, kurumlarının örgütsel hiyerarşisi içinde, AB yükseköğretim programlarıyla ilgili olarak politika transferi ve uygulama sürecinde hangi rolleri oynar?

2. UOP, AB yükseköğretim programlarının kendi kurumsal ve ulusal bağlamlarına politika transferi ve uygulanması sırasında hangi zorluklar ve güçlüklerle karşılaşır? UOP, bu zorlukları kendi kurumsal ve ulusal çerçevelerinde nasıl yönetir ve ele alır?

3. Bu üç ülkenin farklı kurumsal ve ulusal ortamları ve AB ile farklı ilişki biçimleri, AB yükseköğretim programlarının yorumlanmasını, uygulanmasını ve sonuçlarını nasıl etkiler?

4. Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki yükseköğretim kurumlarındaki UOP, AB yükseköğretim programlarını ve politikalarını kendi yerel ve kurumsal bağlamlarında nasıl algılar ve yorumlar?

Bu çalışma; AB dışı ülkelerde karşılaştırmalı bir analiz sunarak, politika transferini ve Avrupalılaşma gibi birden fazla teorik çerçeveyi entegre ederek ve uluslararası eğitim politikalarının uygulanmasında daha önce bir analiz birimi ve aktör olarak çok fazla incelenmemiş UOP'nin rollerine vurgu sağlayarak mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. AB dışı bağlamlara ve UOP'nin perspektiflerine odaklanarak bu tez

yalnızca AB yükseköğretim programları literatüründeki bir boşluğa katkı sağlamakla kalmamakta, aynı zamanda aşağıdan yukarıya Avrupalılaşma ve politika transferi çerçevelerini entegre eden özgün bir analitik çerçeve de sunmaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışma, yumuşak bir politika alanı olarak yükseköğretimde uluslararasılaşma ve politika adaptasyonu üzerine akademik ve uygulamalı tartışmalara önemli bir katkı olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Avrupa Birliği Yükseköğretim Programları

AB'nin eğitim alanında net ve üstün bir yetkinliği olmamasına rağmen, mekanizmaları ve programları yardımıyla sadece üye ülkeler için değil, aynı zamanda AB dışı ülkeler için de yükseköğretim politikalarında oldukça etkili olmuştur. Yükseköğretim alanında Birliğin mekanizmalarının, 1987'de kurulan ve en bilinen programlardan olan Erasmus programından ve Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı'nı yaratmayı amaçlayan Bologna Süreci'nden, Tempus ve Erasmus Mundus gibi AB dışı ülkeler için sunulan programlara kadar değiştiği ve genişlediği görülmektedir. Zamanla, AB tarafından koordine edilen programların sayısı ve coğrafi alanları daha kapsamlı ve iddialı bir şekilde genişlemiştir. Özellikle 2014-2015 dönemlerinde tasarlanan Erasmus+ ICM Programı ile 14 farklı bölgeden 120'den fazla ortak ülke (gelecek stratejilerinde üyelik perspektifi olmayan ülkeler bile) bu programa dahil olarak AB düzenlemelerini transfer etmeyi kabul etmiştir.

Bu programlar ve mekanizmalar, artan katılımcı sayısı ve bütçeler ile üye devletler göz önüne alındığında oldukça etkilidir. 1987'den beri 13 milyondan fazla yararlanıcı yalnızca Erasmus programına katılmış; EMJMD programı ise yaklaşık 14.000 Avrupalı ve Avrupalı olmayan öğrenciye 900'den fazla burs sağlamıştır. Dahası, Avrupa içi Erasmus programı 33 program ülkesini içerirken; Pasifik'ten Atlantik'e 48 ülke, Avrupa Yüksek Öğrenimini Avrupa'nın coğrafi sınırlarının ötesine taşıyan Bologna Deklarasyonu'nun imzacısıdır. Benzer şekilde, Tempus, AB üyeleri ve program ülkelerine ek olarak Doğu Avrupa, Orta Asya, Batı Balkanlar, Kuzey Afrika ve Orta Doğu'daki 28 ortak ülkeyi içermekte; EMJMD ise yalnızca 33 program ülkesini değil, aynı zamanda Batı Balkanlar, Doğu Ortaklığı Ülkeleri, Güney Akdeniz Ülkeleri, Rusya Federasyonu, Asya, Orta Asya, Latin Amerika vb. gibi dünyanın diğer

bölgelerini de bir araya getirmektedir. Son olarak, coğrafi kapsam açısından AB'nin en kapsamlı programlarından biri olan Erasmus+ ICM programı, 14 farklı bölgeden 120'den fazla ülkeyi içermektedir.

Bu programlar iki açıdan birbirini tamamlayıcı nitelikte olmuştur. Bir yandan, AB programlarının yeni dinamikler ve koşullarla AB sınırları dışına doğru genişlemesini göstermektedir. Diğer yandan, bazıları yalnızca öğrenci/personel hareketliliğine odaklanırken; diğerleri yükseköğretim kurumlarını modernize etmeyi, geçişi ve reformu kolaylaştırmayı veya yüksek lisans düzeyindeki öğrenciler için ortak bir derece sunmayı hedeflemiştir. Özellikle AB dışı ülkelere uygulanabilen programlar, halihazırda var olan AB mekanizmalarının farklı bölgelerde ve dinamiklerde yeniden benimsenmesi ve aktarılmasıyla geliştirilmiştir. Ayrıca, bu programlar yalnızca Avrupa yükseköğretim politikalarının genişlemesinin ve Birliğin AB dışı ülkeler üzerindeki etkisinin örnekleri değil, aynı zamanda AB'nin yükseköğretim anlayışının ve küresel arenadaki yükseköğretim politikalarının tarihsel gelişimini ve evrimini de göstermektedir. Özellikle 1990'ların ikinci yarısından itibaren, yükseköğretimin doğası sadece Avrupa'da değil, aynı zamanda bilgi ekonomisinin etkisiyle küresel arenada da dönüşmüştür. Bilgi ekonomisine ve gerekliliklerine artan vurgu ile, yükseköğretim kurumlarına esnek ve karmaşık iş piyasasının gerekli beceri ve yetkinliklerine sahip iş gücünü yetiştirme misyonu atfedilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, sadece AB içindeki yükseköğretimin vurgusu değil, tüm dünyada yükseköğretim politikaları dönüşüme uğramıştır. Bu bağlamda, AB, özellikle gerekli becerilere sahip yeni yetenekleri çekmek ve Avrupa yükseköğretim kurumlarının kalitesini ve uluslararasılaşmasını geliştirmek amacıyla yükseköğretim programlarını Birlik dışındaki ülkelere de genişletmiştir. Lizbon Gündemi, bilgi ekonomisi, yükseköğretim üzerindeki artan baskılar ve özelleştirilmesi gibi çeşitli tarihi dinamikler, AB'nin hem sınırları içinde hem de dışında yükseköğretim politikalarını etkilemiştir.

Analiz Ülkelerinin ve Kurumların Seçimi

Farklı jeopolitik, kültürel ve eğitimsel bağlamları nedeniyle, Bosna-Hersek, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti ve Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti, bu doktora tezi için vaka çalışmaları olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu ülkelerin seçimi, Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonellerinin AB

yükseköğrenim programlarını nasıl yorumlayıp yürüttüğünü anlamak için kapsamlı ve karşılaştırılabilir çerçeveler sunmaktadır.

Hatipoğlu'nun (2003) açıkladığı gibi, karşılaştırmalı siyasette analiz için vaka seçimi, özellikle sınırlı sayıda vaka içeren çalışmalarda kritik bir önem taşır. Bu kapsamda vaka seçiminde, 19. yüzyıl düşünürü John Stuart Mill'in çalışmalarına dayanan iki önemli strateji yaygın olarak kullanılır: En Benzer Sistem Tasarımı (MSSD) ve En Farklı Sistem Tasarımı (MDSD). MSSD, mümkün olduğunca benzer, öncelikle ana bağımsız değişkende farklılık gösteren vakaları seçmeyi içerir. Bu yaklaşım, diğer benzerlikleri kontrol ederek bağımsız değişkenin etkisini izole etmeye yardımcı olur. Tersine, MDSD stratejisi mümkün olduğunca farklı, ancak ana bağımsız değişken açısından benzer vakaları seçer. Bu yöntem, bağımsız değişkenle bağlantılı ortak noktaları belirlemek için çeşitli bağlamlarda hipotezleri test eder (Hatipoğlu, 2013). Bu tezde, Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan ve Çin'in seçimi MDSD yaklaşımıyla daha yakından uyumludur. Bu ülkeler, siyasi sistemler, kültürel geçmişler ve ekonomik kalkınma düzeyleri gibi çeşitli yönlerden farklılık göstermektedir. Ancak, uluslararasılaşma politikalarının uygulanmasında, özellikle Erasmus+ gibi AB yükseköğretim programlarının benimsenmesinde ve üniversiteleri içinde ayrı birimler olarak Uluslararası Ofislerin kurulmasında benzerlikler paylaşmaktadırlar. Bu yaklaşım, UOP'nin rollerinin ve algılarının her ülkenin farklı sistemik özelliklerine rağmen ortak kalıplar gösterip göstermediğinin incelenmesine olanak tanımaktadır.

Bu üç ülkenin seçilmesi, araştırmaya ek değer ve bir dizi önemli fayda sağlamaktadır. Bu üç ülkenin her biri, politik, ekonomik ve tarihsel geçmişleri ve AB ile ilişkileri açısından birbirlerinden ayrılan belirli özelliklere sahiptir. Yükseköğrenimin uluslararasılaşması ve finansmanı, AB ile yürüttükleri farklı işbirlikleri ve etkileşimleri, politik ve ekonomik yapılarının etkisi ve küresel güç yapıları içindeki yerleri ve etkileri gibi farklılıklar, görüşme sonuçlarını karşılaştırmamıza olanak sağlamaktadır. Diğer taraftan, bu ülkelerin özgünlüğü, piyasa ekonomisindeki daha kısa geçmişleri, küreselleşmeye geç entegre olmaları ve yükseköğretim politikalarını piyasa gelişmelerine yanıt olarak uyarlamalarında yatmaktadır. Dahası, bu ülkeler neredeyse köklü değişiklikler ve reformlar deneyimledikleri için yeni kurumsal girişimleri denemeye daha açıktırlar. Bu tez, evrensel ve genelleştirilmiş sonuçlar

yerine, aşağıdan yukarıya araştırma tasarımı yoluyla bağlam tabanlı farklılıkları anlamaya çalıştığından, bu özgün ve karşılaştırılabilir nitelikler, çalışmanın amaçları bakımından önem teşkil etmektedir.

AB üyeliği için resmi adaylık statüsüne sahip Batı Balkanlar'daki bir ülke olarak Bosna-Hersek, AB politikalarının ve girişimlerinin önemli bir etkiye sahip olduğu bir ortamın örneğini temsil etmektedir. Ayrıca, savaş sonrası toparlanma, bütünleşme ve devlet inşası çabalarıyla öne çıkan Bosna-Hersek'teki yükseköğrenim kurumları, geçiş sürecindeki bir toplumda AB girişimlerini yürütmenin zorluklarını ve başarılarını araştırmak için farklı bir ortam sunmaktadır. Bosna-Hersek, Bologna Süreci, Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı, Erasmus+ ve benzeri program ve süreçlere entegre olmuş durumdadır. İdari, finansal ve devlet kapasitesi açısından sınırlılığa sahip olan Bosna-Hersek'te veto aktörleri olarak siyasi aktörler ve etnik çatışmalar etkili görünmekte, AB ile ilişkileri çoğunlukla asimetrik olarak değerlendirilmekte, coğrafi ve kültürel olarak diğer ülkelere kıyasla AB ile daha uyumlu görünmekte, ancak kapasite eksikliği olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti ve Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti, Bosna-Hersek'in aksine, ne AB üyeliğine adaydır ne de yakın geleceğe ilişkin bir adaylık başvuruları vardır. Ancak ekonomik, politik ve coğrafi konumları bu ülkeleri AB'nin önemli müttefikleri haline getirmiştir ve bu durum yükseköğrenim alanındaki bağları ve iş birliğini de etkilemektedir. Kazakistan coğrafi konumu, bölgesel güvenlik açısından önemi ve AB'nin birincil enerji tedarikçilerinden biri olma statüsü nedeniyle AB açısından önemli bir konuma sahiptir. Ülkenin eğitim kurumlarının uluslararası standartlara uyum sağlamak için kapsamlı reformlardan geçtiği göz önüne alındığında, Kazakistan'ın, AB programlarına katılımı ve yükseköğrenim sistemini modernize etme girişimleri, Sovyetler Birliği sonrası bir eğitim ortamında AB politikalarının etkisini incelemek için önemli bir bağlam sağlamaktadır. İdari, finansal ve devlet kapasitesinin daha yüksek olduğu, ancak AB'den gelen teşviklerin hala önemli olduğu Kazakistan'ın enerji kaynakları ve bölgesel güvenlik açısından AB ile daha simetrik ilişkilere sahip olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Öte yandan, kendine özgü siyasi ve eğitim sistemiyle Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti alternatif bir bakış açısını temsil eden önemli bir küresel güçtür. Dünyanın ikinci büyük ekonomisi, AB'nin en önemli ticaret ortaklarından biri ve BM Güvenlik Konseyi'nin veto yetkisine sahip daimî üyesi olarak Çin, yalnızca siyasi ve ekonomik alanlarda değil, aynı zamanda yükseköğrenim alanında da AB'nin hem ortağı hem de rakibidir; çeşitli politikalar ve girişimler aracılığıyla kültür ve eğitimdeki etkisini artırmak için çalışmaktadır. Bu tezin amacı doğrultusunda Çin, merkezi bir eğitim sistemine sahip ve küresel rakip konumundaki Avrupa dışı bir ülkenin, AB yüksek öğrenim programlarını nasıl uyarladığına dair önemli sonuçlar sağlamaktadır. İdari, finansal ve devlet kapasitesi yüksek olan ve AB ile ilişkileri oldukça simetrik görünen Çin'in coğrafi, kültürel ve ideolojik olarak AB'ye yabancı, ancak tam kapasiteye sahip bir durumda olduğu değerlendirilmektedir.

Bu üç ülke arasındaki en belirgin farkın, özellikle yükseköğrenim alanına yapılan yatırımlar ve genel ekonomik büyüme düzeyi olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Bosna-Hersek hala savaş sonrası devlet inşa sürecinde olduğundan ve piyasa ekonomisinin erken aşamalarında bulunduğundan hem yeniden yapılanma hem de yükseköğrenim politikaları için dış finansmana, özellikle AB'ye oldukça bağımlıdır. Bununla birlikte, Kazakistan hükümeti, UNESCO tarafından önerilen ideal orandan hala daha düşük olmasına rağmen, yükseköğrenim gören öğrencilere devlet hibeleri ve eğitim için belirli miktarda devlet harcaması sunmaktadır. Dünyanın ikinci büyük ekonomisi ve ABD'den sonra AB'nin ikinci büyük ticaret ortağı olan Çin ise, büyük projelere ve programlara milyarlarca dolar yatırım yapmakta ve hem yurtiçinde hem de yurtdışında uluslararası çalışmalar için çok sayıda burs fırsatı sunmaktadır.

Ayrıca, bu ülkeler, yükseköğretim kurumu sayısı, uluslararasılaşma çabaları ve yatırım düzeyleri bakımından da farklılık göstermektedir. Çin, hızla büyüyen bir ekonominin taleplerini karşılamak için 1990'ların sonunda yükseköğretimi kitleselleştirmesi sonucunda 2750'den fazla yükseköğretim kurumuna sahipken, Kazakistan'da yaklaşık 130 ve Bosna-Hersek'te yaklaşık 50 üniversite bulunmaktadır. Uluslararasılaşma açısından, Kazakistan, uluslararası öğrencileri çekmek ve eğitim sistemini Orta Asya'nın merkezi olarak konumlandırmak amacıyla Bosna-Hersek'ten daha iddialı bir hükümet politikası izliyor gibi görünmektedir. Öte yandan Çin, (özellikle 2000'lerden

bu yana) “Çin'de Eğitim Girişimi (Study in China)” nin kurulması, yurtdışında yükseköğretim kurumları şubelerinin oluşturulması, Konfüçyüs Enstitüleri'nin etkisinin kullanılması ve gelişmekte olan ülkelere uluslararası kalkınma yardımı sağlanması gibi daha da iddialı bir strateji benimsemiştir. Bu anlamda Çin, özellikle dünyanın hemen her yerinde kurulmuş olan Konfüçyüs Enstitüleri'nin yardımıyla, Çin kültürünü, modellerini, dilini ve benzeri ihraç etmek için Kazakistan ve Bosna-Hersek’in aksine daha dışa dönük bir uluslararasılaşma stratejisini aktif olarak takip etmektedir.

Bu üç ülkenin çalışma kapsamında analiz edilmek üzere seçilmesinin nedenlerine ek olarak, çalışmaya dahil olan yükseköğretim kurumlarının açıklanması önemlidir. Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonelleriyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapmak amacıyla, Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki belirli yükseköğretim kurumlarına davetler iletilmiştir. Bu kurumların tercih edilmesi kararı, bu tezin araştırma hedefleri üzerinde büyük bir etkiye de sahip olan bir dizi faktör tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Bu faktörler arasında kurumların uluslararasılaşma düzeyleri, mevcut işbirlikleri ve İngilizce iletişim becerileri ve yanıt verebilirlikleri yer almaktadır.

Bu araştırmayı yürüten doktora öğrencisi aynı zamanda Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ) Uluslararası İşbirliği Ofisi'nde (UİO) görev almaktadır. Bu nedenle, öncelikle, yerleşik güven ve iletişim kanallarından yararlanmak amacıyla ODTÜ ile halihazırda bir ortaklığı ve anlaşması olan kurumlar seçilmiştir. ODTÜ'nün halihazırda ortaklık kurduğu kurumlara ek olarak, Türkiye'deki diğer yükseköğretim kurumlarının uluslararası ofislerinden daveti ortaklarına iletmeleri konusunda yardım rica edilmiştir. Ayrıca, ODTÜ Konfüçyüs Merkezi ve bölgeyle yakın çalışan öğretim üyeleriyle (örneğin, Asya Çalışmaları lisansüstü programında) iletişim kurulması daha zor olan Çin gibi ülkeler konusunda yardım talep etmek için irtibata geçilmiş ve bu aktörlerin bağlantılarından da yararlanılmıştır.

Ek olarak, uluslararası sıralama sistemlerinde üst sıralarda yer alan ve dolayısıyla yüksek uluslararasılaşma kapasitesine sahip kurumlara ulaşılmaya çalışılmıştır. Ayrıca, görüşmelerin yürütülmesinin uygulanabilirliğini ve veri toplamanın

doğruluğunu etkileyen önemli faktörlerden biri de bu kurumların ve ilgili aktörlerin İngilizce olarak net bir şekilde iletişim kurabilme becerisidir. Bu bakımdan araştırmacının davetine yanıt veren kurumlar ve onların duyarlılığı da kurumun uluslararasılaşma kapasitesi açısından olumlu bir işaret olarak görülmüştür. Son olarak seçilen üniversiteler, uluslararası ve/veya AB yükseköğrenim programlarından sorumlu resmi ve aktif uluslararası ofislere sahip olanlardır. Bu durum, bazı kurumların bu tür programlarla özel olarak ilgilenen birimlerinin olmaması, bunun yerine Kabul Ofisleri veya Öğrenci İşleri Ofislerinin normal görevlerine ek olarak uluslararası ve/veya AB programlarıyla ilgilenmesi göz önünde bulundurulduğunda önemli bir ölçüttür.

Temel Analiz Birimi Olarak Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonelleri

Uluslararası Ofis Profesyonelleri (UOP), AB yükseköğrenim girişimlerinin ve programlarının kurumsal uygulamalara aktarılması, yürütülmesi, uyarlanması ve entegrasyonunda aracı olarak kritik işlevleri nedeniyle çalışmanın temel analiz birimi olarak seçilmiştir. Bu araştırma tasarımında, yükseköğretim kurumlarının yönetimi orta analiz seviyesi olarak kabul edilirken, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Yükseköğretim Kurulu gibi ulusal otoriteler daha üst analiz seviyeleri olarak ele alınmış ve Avrupa Komisyonu gibi bölgesel ve uluslararası otoriteler en üst analiz seviyesi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

Ulusal otoriteler, uluslararası çerçeveler ve kurumsal yönetimin kesişimindeki özel konumları nedeniyle bu profesyoneller, Avrupalılaşma ve politika transferi zorluklarının müzakeresinde olmazsa olmazdır. Ulusal politika yapıcılarının veya kurumsal yöneticilerin aksine, UOP uluslararasılaşmanın ve AB programlarının operasyonel yönlerine doğrudan dahildir. Kurumları içinde AB program prosedürlerinin etkili bir şekilde uygulanmasını sağlamaktan sorumludurlar ve bunlar hakkında kapsamlı bilgiye sahiptirler. Resmî karar alma yetkileri olmasa da UOP'nin bilgi ve danışmanlık rolleri sıklıkla daha üst düzeydeki kararlar üzerinde etkili olur ve

bu da onları politika uygulama dinamiklerinin aşağıdan yukarıya önemli katılımcıları haline getirir.

Çeşitli uluslararası eğitim çerçeveleri ve sistemleri hakkında uzmanlaşmış bilgiye sahip olan UOP, Erasmus+ gibi programların kurumsal düzeylerde nasıl görüldüğü ve yürütüldüğü konusunda önemli değerlendirmeler sağlayabilen uzmanlardır, çünkü genellikle bu tür girişimlerin standartları, ön koşulları ve hedefleri hakkında bilgi sahibidirler. Ön sıradaki konumları nedeniyle (bu nedenle Bulut Şahin, 2023 gibi yazarlar tarafından "sokak düzeyindeki bürokratlar-street level bureaucrats" olarak adlandırılırlar), yükseköğretim kurumlarının uluslararası ofislerinde çalışan bu profesyoneller, uluslararası standartları entegre etme, kültürel farklılıkları ve idari engelleri aşma gibi çeşitli sorunlarla doğrudan ilgilenirler. Bu nedenle, uluslararası ofisler, düzenli görevlerinin dışındaki görevleri ele alan çok dilli ve kalifiye personele sahip yüksek becerili birimler olarak tanımlanabilir. Organizasyon yapısı açısından ise uluslararası ofisler, hem ulusal hem de uluslararası çalışmaları, ortaklıkları ve bağlantıları olan hem idari hem de akademik birimler olarak betimlenebilir.

Tran ve diğer yazarlara (2020) göre, uluslararası eğitim alanı ve yükseköğretimde uluslararası ofislerin oluşturulması -çoğunlukla 1990'lara kadar uzanmaktadır- nedeniyle, UOP, uluslararası eğitimin sürekli gelişen uygulamalarına, özel ihtiyaçlara ve küresel eğilimlere uyum sağlayabilmesi gereken farklı profesyonellerdir. Yükseköğretim kurumlarının örgütsel hiyerarşisi içinde, UOP, kurumları ile devlet otoriteleri, uluslararası/bölgesel örgütler ve muadilleri gibi dış ortaklar arasında bir köprü görevi görerek politika transferi fırsatlarını hızlandırır. Ancak, çoğunlukla politika yapma ve politika transferi süreci üzerinde doğrudan bir yetkiye sahip değildirler ve kurumun Rektörüne veya ilgili Rektör Yardımcısına rapor verirler.

Hali hazırda yurtdışındaki kurumlarla işbirliği yapan ve bilgi paylaşan ve çeşitli uluslararası forumlara ve ağlara katılan ve yurtdışına seyahat etmeye daha meyilli olan uluslararası ofis profesyonelleri (örneğin personel hareketlilik programları, uluslararası eğitim fuarları ve ortak ziyaretleri yoluyla), üst yönetimlerine kurumlarının stratejilerini ve uygulamalarını dünyadaki politikalar ve eğilimlerle nasıl uyumlu hale getirecekleri konusunda tavsiyelerde bulunarak politika transfer

süreçlerini yönlendirmede ve etkinleştirmede etkili bir rol oynamaktadır. Öte yandan UOP, uluslararası örgütler ve üyelikler, devlet organları (örneğin Türkiye örneğinde YÖK ve Türkiye Ulusal Ajansı) ve üniversite yönetimleri tarafından iletilen politikaları uygulamaktan sorumludur. Bununla birlikte, uluslararası ofis personelleri, kurumsal yapı ve kültürün buna göre ilerlediği ve algılarının ve kararlarının çalışma ortamlarından hala etkilenebileceği bağlamla sınırlı ortamlardan tamamen özgür de değildir (Bulut Şahin, vd., 2023).

Nitel Çalışma: Yarı-Yapılandırılmış Mülakatlar

Bu çalışma kapsamında, ilgili araştırma sorularını yanıtlamak için nitel bir araştırma tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Bu kapsamda, 3 farklı ülkedeki 13 farklı kurumla (Bosna-Hersek'ten 3 kurum, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'nden 4 kurum ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nden 6 kurum) Ağustos-Kasım 2024 döneminde yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşülecek kurum ve UOP sayıları belirlenirken, ülkelerin nüfus oranları (Bosna-Hersek: 3.164.253; Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti: 20.592.571; Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti: 1.419.321.278, 2024 itibarıyla) ve yükseköğretim kurumlarının sayıları (Bosna-Hersek: 45; Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti: 112; Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti: 2023-2024 akademik yılı itibarıyla 2740) da dikkate alınmıştır.

Örneklem büyüklüğü sınırlı olsa da katılımcıların bakış açıları ve yanıtları kurumsal durumları yansıtmaktadır, çünkü görüşülen katılımcıların tamamı uluslararası programlara, AB yüksek öğrenim girişimlerine, uluslararası projelere ve uluslararası öğrenci ve personel hareketlilik süreçlerine doğrudan katılım gösteren personellerdir. Ayrıca, veriler önemli ölçüde çeşitlidir ve her biri kendine özgü kurumsal, kültürel ve coğrafi özelliklere sahip 3 farklı ulusal bağlamdan katılımcıların dahil edilmesiyle derinleştirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, örneklem, çalışmanın araştırma sorularının karmaşıklıklarını ve nüanslarını başarıyla yakalayan güçlü ve önemli bir veri kümesidir.

Çalışmanın nitel nitelikte olması amaçlanmıştır, çünkü nitel çalışmanın veri kaynağı, insanlara veya bireylere ve yaşadıkları deneyimlere aittir. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerini politika transferi ve aşağıdan yukarıya Avrupalılaşmanın teorik perspektifleriyle

bütünleştirmek, bu tezin kavramaya çalıştığı karmaşık olguları araştırmak için yapılandırılmış ancak esnek bir yaklaşım sağlar. Bu çalışmanın amacı, UOP'nin AB yükseköğretim programlarını anlama ve yorumlamalarını araştırmak ve rollerini anlamak olduğundan, bu durum kaçınılmaz olarak nitel bir araştırma tasarımının uygulanmasıyla sonuçlanmıştır. Seçilen ülkelerdeki UOP'nin AB yükseköğrenim programlarının politikalarını yorumlama, uygulama ve manevra yapma yollarını anlamak, bireysel deneyimleri, öznel yorumları ve bağlamsal incelikleri araştıran kapsamlı bir araştırma gerektirmiştir. Bu nedenle, katılımcıların doğal ortamlarındaki bakış açılarından olguları anlamaya odaklanan ve nicel yaklaşımların gözden kaçırdığı zengin, derinlemesine iç görüler sunan nitel araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Araştırma sorularını etkili bir şekilde ele almak için gereken zengin ve ayrıntılı verileri toplamak amacıyla nitel araştırma, katılımcıların öznel anlayışlarını daha derinlemesine araştırma esnekliği sunmaktadır. Dahası, bu çalışma, kendi özgün yükseköğrenim ortamlarına sahip çok çeşitli kültürel ve coğrafi bağlamları kapsamaktadır. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanımı, özellikle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler sayesinde bu bağlamsal farklılıkların anlaşılması ve her ülkenin kendine özgü bağlamına uyacak şekilde soruları değiştirme esnekliği sunmaktadır.

Mülakat protokolü, toplamda 21 ana soru ve 16 alt soru olmak üzere 6 bölümden oluşmuştur. Mülakat protokolünün ilk bölümü olan 1'den 8'e kadar olan sorular demografik verileri toplamak için sorulmuştur. İkinci bölüm, 9 ila 12 arasındaki sorular, ev sahibi kurumun ve uluslararası ofislerinin yapısını, kurumsal geçmişini, mevcut durumunu, temel görev ve sorumluluklarını ve Üniversitenin diğer birimleri, yönetimi ve ülkedeki diğer uluslararası ofislerle ilişkilerini anlamaya yöneliktir. Mülakatın üçüncü bölümü, 13 ve 14 numaralı sorular, ev sahibi kurumun uluslararasılaşma stratejisi, AB programlarının bu stratejilerdeki rolü ve uluslararası ofisin iş yükü ve ev sahibi kurumun AB programlarına katılımının arkasındaki temel motivasyonlar aracılığıyla UOP'nin AB programlarına ilişkin algısını kavramak üzere tasarlanmıştır. Dördüncü bölüm, 15 ila 17 arasındaki sorular, AB programlarının ulusal stratejilerdeki yerini, uluslararası ofislerin AB programlarının transferindeki rolünü ve üniversite yönetimi ve ulusal otoriteler tarafından bu programlara ilişkin olarak yönetilen karar alma süreçlerini UOP gözünden daha ayrıntılı olarak anlamak

için hazırlanmıştır. Beşinci bölüm, 18 ve 19 numaralı sorular, UOP'nin AB programlarının yerel kurumsal ve ulusal bağlamlarda uygulanmasına ilişkin bakış açılarını, olası değişiklikleri ve yerel filtreleri ve bu programların yürütülmesi sırasında karşılaşılabilecek yasal ve kurumsal zorlukları ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Mülakat protokolünün son bölümü olan 20 ve 21 numaralı sorular ise kapanış bölümü olarak tasarlanmıştır.

Görüşülen kişilerin demografik bilgilerine baktığımızda, genellikle orta yaşlı katılımcılar oldukları, en yaşlı katılımcının 50, en geç katılımcının 27 yaşında olduğu ve katılımcıların yaş ortalamasının 39 olduğu görülmektedir. Ayrıca, katılımcıların çoğunluğu kadındır, görüşülen 13 kişiden 10'u kadın, üçü erkektir. Görüşülen kişilerin uluslararasılaşma alanındaki kıdemlerine bakıldığında ise, en kıdemli kişinin 25 yıl, en az kıdemli kişinin ise yarım yıl deneyime sahip olduğu ve ortalama kıdemin 11 yıl olduğu görülmektedir.

Bu tez, seçilen 3 ülkede bulunan yükseköğretim kurumlarında çalışan UOP'ne odaklandığından, fiziksel görüşmeler yapmak mümkün olmamıştır. Bu nedenle, veri toplama süreci, katılımcıların ülkeleri ve Türkiye'nin farklı zaman dilimlerinde olması göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, planlamada esneklik sağlayan Zoom yazılım programı ile çevrimiçi olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılara davet metninde ve görüşmenin başında görüşme sırasında video kaydı yapılacağı bildirilmiştir. Saha çalışması sırasında toplam 618 dakika video görüşmesi kaydedilmiş ve görüşmeler ortalama 51,5 dakika sürmüştür. En uzun görüşme 80 dakika, en kısa görüşme ise 40 dakikadır. Görüşme kayıtları, Otter.ai adlı bir yazılım programı kullanılarak kelimesi kelimesine yazıya dökülmüş ve yazılı formata aktarılmıştır.

Çalışma kapsamında hem teorik çerçevelerden gelen kodları hem de ham verinin kendisinden getirilen kodları kullanan hibrit kodlama yöntemi uygulanmıştır. Analizin ilk aşamaları; araştırma soruları, görüşme soruları ve politika transferi ve Avrupalılaşmanın teorik çerçeveleri (sosyolojik kurumsalcı ve aşağıdan yukarıya yaklaşım) tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Örneğin, "AB Yükseköğretim Programlarına Katılım Motivasyonları" teması, Dolowitz ve Marsh (2000) tarafından geliştirilen politika transferi çerçevesindeki "neden transfer" sorusundan türetilmiştir. Benzer

şekilde, “Yasal ve Kurumsal Zorluklar” teması, Dolowitz ve Marsh (2000) tarafından aynı çerçevede geliştirilen “transferin kısıtlamaları”ndan türetilmiştir. Ancak, analizin sonraki kısımlarında, verilerin kendisinden türetilen kodlama da bu çalışmaya rehberlik etmiştir. Örneğin, politika transferi çerçevesinin farklı unsurları “AB Yükseköğretim Programlarına Katılım Motivasyonları” temasına rehberlik etse de, verinin kendisi “Kurumsal Motivasyonlar”, “Finansal Motivasyonlar”, “Bireysel Motivasyonlar” gibi alt temalara ve hatta “Sosyal/Kültürel/Politik Motivasyon” gibi daha da spesifik ve özgün alt temalara ulaşılmasını sağlamıştır. Sonuç olarak, analiz tümdengelimli ve tümevarımlı kodlama sistemlerinin tamamlayıcı ve bir arada kullanımı yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca, teorik çerçevenin önemine rağmen, doğrudan alttaki aktörlerin yanıtlarından gelen kodlamanın bu sürecin kaçınılmaz bir parçası olduğunu belirtmek de önemlidir, çünkü bu çalışma doğası gereği aşağıdan yukarıya doğrudur.

Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilen verileri analiz edebilmek için, başlangıçta her bir metni ayrı ayrı incelenmiş, her metindeki sorulara verilen yanıtlar tanımlanmıştır. Tüm metinlerdeki yanıtları soruya göre yatay olarak incelemek yerine, her metin baştan sona sistematik olarak incelenmiş ve bu da belgeyi ve ilgili yanıtları tanımayı sağlamıştır. Bu inceleme sırasında, işaretleme yöntemini kullanarak Microsoft Word'deki belgeler üzerinde çalışılmıştır. Bu süreç, her bir metindeki verileri düzenlemeyi ve ardından yanıtları Microsoft Excel tablolarında konsolide edilmiş bir tabloda ilgili konu kategorilerine göre sınıflandırma yapmayı sağlamıştır. Bu yolla, kurumlar arasında aynı soruya verilen yanıtlar karşılaştırılabilmiştir. Tüm kurumların aynı soruya verdiği yanıtlar tek bir Microsoft Excel tablosunda görülebildiği için, veriler ilgili konu kategorilerine ve alt temalara göre sınıflandırılabilmiştir. Veriler Microsoft Excel belgesinde kategorize edildikten sonra, satır satır manuel olarak kodlamaya yapılmış; bu da başa dönüp aynı satırları tekrar tekrar kontrol ederek sıralamayı, alt temaları ve kodları ayrıntılı olarak analiz edebilmeyi sağlamıştır. Ardından Microsoft Excel’de yer alan veriler, temalar ve kodlamalar çevrimiçi MAXQADA programına aktarılmış ve bu program aracılığıyla hem genel olarak hem de ülke bazlı olarak kodların kullanım sıklıklarına ilişkin görseller ve tablolar oluşturulabilmiştir.

Bulguların Analizi ve Sonuç

Görüşmelerden elde edilen bulgulara ve bunların tezin araştırma soruları bağlamında incelenmesine baktığımızda, ilk araştırma sorusu şudur: "Analizin temel birimi olarak UOP, ara veya üst düzeydeki karar alıcı aktörleri etkileyebilir mi? Bu anlamda, UOP, kurumlarının örgütsel hiyerarşisi içinde, AB yükseköğretim programlarıyla ilgili olarak politika transferi ve uygulama sürecinde hangi rolleri oynar?" Bu soruya cevap verebilecek alt temaları ve sonuçları analiz ettiğimizde, aşağıdaki temel sonuçlar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Kurumsal düzeyde önemli bir bulgu, Rektörler veya Rektör Yardımcıları gibi üst düzey liderlik uluslararası ofisleri denetlese bile, UOP'nin uluslararasılaşma ve AB projeleri hakkındaki kurumsal kararlar üzerinde hala önemli bir etkiye sahip olduğunun görünmesidir. Karar almanın merkezileştirildiği durumlarda bile, UOP'nin bilgisi ve rehberliği büyük ölçüde dikkate alınmaktadır. Bu nedenle, resmi karar alma yetkileri olmasa bile, uzmanlaşmış bilgileri sıklıkla kurumsal yönlendirmelere ve politika uyarlamalarına rehberlik etmektedir. Ancak, bu etkinin derecesi yerel, idari ve kurumsal yapılara, çerçevelere ve önceliklere göre değişmektedir. Bazı ofisler kurumsal uluslararasılaşma gündemlerini oluşturmada önemli bir rol oynarken, diğerleri esas olarak tavsiyelerde bulunarak veya hareketliliği kolaylaştırarak destekleyici bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu bağlamda katılımcılar, uluslararası ofisler tarafından başlatılan ve daha sonra kurumsal düzeyde yaygınlaşan farklı girişimleri açıklayarak UOP'in etkisini açıklamaya çalışmıştır. Örneğin, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'ndeki katılımcılar, uluslararası ofisler tarafından başlatılan kapsamlı bir uluslararasılaşma haritası ve çevrimiçi akademinin geliştirilmesini örnek vermiştir. Benzer şekilde, Bosna-Hersek'teki katılımcılar, başlangıçta kurumsal yönetim tarafından bilinmeyen ve anlaşılmayan, ancak daha sonra yaygın olarak kabul ve takdir edilen uluslararası personel haftasının geliştirilmesini ve ortaklık konusunda öneride bulunma rollerini örnek olarak açıklamışlardır. Son olarak, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki katılımcılar, uluslararası öğrenciler için tasarlanan bir dersin ve nihayetinde Eğitim Bakanlığı'nın da dikkatini çeken İngiltere ortaklarıyla tıp programının geliştirilmesini örnek vermişlerdir. Bunların hepsi, AB politikalarının transferinin tek boyutlu veya yukarıdan aşağıya olmadığını ve UOP'nin bu bağlamda önemli bir aşağıdan yukarıya arabulucu görevi gördüğünü göstermektedir.

Ancak ulusal düzeyde, UOP'nin kurumsal düzeydeki kadar etkili olduğunu söylemek zordur. Her ülkede, katılımcılar ulusal düzeyde uluslararası ofisler tarafından başlatılan birer örnek sunabilmiştir. Örneğin, Kazakistan'daki bir katılımcı, uluslararası ofisin önerileriyle başlatılan ve daha sonra Bakanlık ile işbirliği yapılan belirli bir dersin oluşturulmasını açıklamıştır. Benzer şekilde, Bosna-Hersek'te, ülkedeki uluslararası ofislerin uyguladığı baskı sonucunda, uluslararası öğrencilerin oturma izni süreçleri için gereken belge sayısının azaltıldığı anlaşılmıştır. Ve son olarak, Çin'den bir katılımcı, uluslararası ofis olarak, farklı ülkelerden 30 üniversitenin bulunduğu ve şu anda yerel yönetimler tarafından desteklenen kapsamlı bir uluslararası ağ kurduklarını açıklamıştır. Dolayısıyla, UOP'nin ulusal düzeyde kararları etkilediğine dair yalnızca birkaç örnek bulunmaktadır; ancak yine de bu durum ülkedeki diğer ofisler tarafından da desteklenirlerse, gelecekte ulusal düzeyde daha önemli değişiklikleri etkileyebileceklerinin bir işareti olarak yorumlanmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, uluslararası ofislerin ulusal düzeydeki etkileri açısından ülkedeki diğer uluslararası ofislerle nasıl ilişki kurduğunu anlamak da önemlidir, çünkü bu profesyoneller bir araya gelerek ve baskı oluşturarak ulusal düzeyde de etki yaratabilmektedir. Ulusal bağlamlardan etkilenen küçük farklılıklara rağmen, neredeyse tüm katılımcılar aynı ülkedeki diğer uluslararası ofislerle işbirlikçi bir ilişkiden bahsetmiştir. Dolayısıyla, üç bağlamdaki uluslararası ofisler, yerel düzeyde ortak bir zemin bulmalarına ve muhtemelen ulusal düzeydeki kararları etkilemelerine veya başlatmalarına olanak tanıyan yatay politika öğrenme ağları kurmuş gibi görünmektedir. Ancak burada, bazı katılımcıların da belirttiği gibi, bu işbirlikçi ilişkinin en temel nedeninin Erasmus+ programlarında, ortak ülkelerin program bütçesi için başvuruda bulunmaması ve rekabet etmemesi; program ülkelerinin başvurularına entegre edilmesi olduğu belirtilmelidir. Dolayısıyla, bir fon için rekabet etmedikleri için işbirliği daha belirgin hale gelmektedir. Örneğin, Bosna-Hersek'ten bir katılımcı, Bosna-Hersek'in program ülkesi olması durumunda bu iş birliği durumunun muhtemelen değişeceğini belirtmiştir. Öte yandan, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'ndeki iş birliğinin en önemli unsuru, ülke içindeki kurumlar arasındaki değişim faaliyetleri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Çin'e baktığımızda ise ülkenin büyüklüğünden dolayı her kurumun ülkenin farklı bir yerinde bulunduğunu ve

iletişimin çok sıkı olmadığını belirten katılımcılar mevcuttur. Ayrıca, Çin yükseköğretimindeki hiyerarşik yapı nedeniyle, halihazırda bu hiyerarşinin en üstünde olan kurumların rekabet etmesine gerek olmadığını belirten katılımcılar da olmuştur. Öte yandan, bazı katılımcılar, bunlara rağmen, Çin'de uluslararası sıralamalar ve uluslararası araştırmacılar açısından da bir rekabet olduğunu belirtmiştir.

İkinci araştırma sorusu şudur: "UOP, AB yükseköğretim programlarının kendi kurumsal ve ulusal bağlamlarına politika transferi ve uygulanması sırasında hangi zorluklar ve güçlüklerle karşılaşır? UOP, bu zorlukları kendi kurumsal ve ulusal çerçevelerinde nasıl yönetir ve ele alır?" Bu araştırma sorusu kapsamında nitel veriler; kurumların akademik uyumsuzlukları (çoğunlukla akademik takvimler arasındaki çatışmalar, kredi ve notlandırma sistemleri arasındaki uyumsuzluklar, akademik programlardaki farklılıklar, ders tanıma sorunları ve farklı dillerde sunulan dersler gibi akademik prosedürlerle ilgili) ve kurum içi iletişimdeki zorlukları ile ayrıca yasal ve bürokratik zorlukları, Erasmus+ ve diğer uluslararası programların uygulanmasının önündeki en önemli engeller olarak tasvir edildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu zorlukları ele almak için kurumlar, AB politikalarının doğrudan benimsenmediğini bir kez daha gösteren bazı kurumsal değişiklikler yapıyor gibi görünmektedir. AB programlarını doğrudan uygulamak yerine, kurumlar, müfredata ilişkin ve yapısal değişiklikler (örneğin, AKTS kredilerinin benimsenmesi, ders kredilerinde değişiklikler, zorunlu derslerin daha sonraki dönemlere ertelenmesi, derslerin İngilizce olarak sunulması, değişim öğrencilerinin kayıt süreci, hareketlilik süreçleri için kılavuzların oluşturulması ve değişim dönemlerinde alınan derslerin tanınması zorunluluğu) yaparak bunları yerel bağlamlara uyarlamaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda, Bosna-Hersek ve Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'nden katılımcılar çoğunlukla müfredata ilişkin ve yapısal değişikliklerden (büyük ölçüde Bologna Süreci ile ilgili) bahsederken; diğer yandan Çinli katılımcılar çoğunlukla İngilizce verilen derslerin artırılması gerektiğinden bahsetmiştir. Bunun dışında, Çin'deki katılımcılar, katılımcıların kendi ifadelerine göre, Çin ve Avrupa yükseköğretim sistemleri arasındaki yapısal ve sistemsel kısıtlamalar ve farklılıklar nedeniyle büyük bir yapısal değişikliğe gidilemeyeceğini belirtmiştir.

Bu yönü daha derinlemesine anlamak için, öğrenciler ve personel de dahil olmak üzere üniversite üyelerinin AB yüksek öğrenim programlarını ve bu programlar sonucunda uygulanan kurumsal değişiklikleri destekleyip desteklemedikleri de sorulmuştur. Analiz, öğrencilerin genel olarak uluslararası ve AB programlarını desteklediklerini ve benimsediklerini, bunları ödüllendirici bir deneyim olarak gördüklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Ancak bazı örnekler; idari talepler, iş yükü ve uluslararası ve AB programlarına ilişkin bireysel bakış açılarından etkilenmeleri nedeniyle fakülte üyelerinin bu programlara karşı veto oyuncusu gibi davranabildiğini göstermektedir.

UOP'nin programların uygulanması sırasında karşılaşabilecekleri bir diğer zorluk olarak, kurumsal veya ulusal otoritelerden herhangi bir baskı hissedip hissetmedikleri de sorulmuştur. Kurumsal düzeyde nitel verilerin analizi, 3 ülkede de kurumsal uluslararasılaşma stratejilerinin uluslararası sıralamalar, hareketlilik sayıları ve uluslararası öğrenci ve öğretim üyesi sayısı gibi nicel göstergelere büyük ölçüde dayandığını göstermektedir. Bazı kurumlarda, kaliteyi, görünürlüğü ve rekabet gücünü artırma gibi hedeflere odaklanan nitel göstergeler, daha az sıklıkla tartışılmasına rağmen önemli olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu nedenle, tüm ülkelerde en sık bildirilen uluslararasılaşma baskısı kaynakları, uluslararası öğrenci sayısı, öğretim üyesi katılımı, projeler ve sıralamalar gibi artan nicel ölçütlerdir. Ancak, bu baskı genellikle kurumsal veya ulusal otoritelerden gelen yukarıdan aşağıya zorlayıcı bir güç olarak tanımlanmamıştır; bunun yerine, tipik olarak uluslararası rekabete ve küresel sıralamaların etkisine önem atfedilmiştir. Birçok kurum, AB programlarına gönüllü olarak katılırken kendi planlarını dış taleplerle dengeliyor gibi görünmektedir. Benzer şekilde, ulusal düzeydeki analiz, çoğu durumda ulusal otoritelerin baskısının, programların yukarıdan aşağıya zorla benimsenmesini gerektirmek yerine sayısal hedeflere odaklandığını göstermektedir.

Üçüncü araştırma sorusu şudur: "Bu üç ülkenin farklı kurumsal ve ulusal ortamları ve AB ile farklı ilişki biçimleri, AB yükseköğretim programlarının yorumlanmasını, uygulanmasını ve sonuçlarını nasıl etkiler?" Saha araştırması bulgularının kurumsal düzeyde analizi, uluslararasılaşmanın 2000'li yıllarda üç ülkede büyük ölçüde kurumsallaştığını, bu durumun ülkelerin farklı siyasi ve ekonomik bağlamlarının yanı sıra AB ile değişen ilişkilerini de yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bosna-Hersek'te,

katılımcı bir kurum ilk uluslararası faaliyetlerinin 1965'lerde gerçekleştiğini belirtmiştir. Ancak, uluslararası ofislerin kurulması ve uluslararasılaşmanın kurumsallaşması savaştan sonra ve özellikle 2000'lerin ikinci yarısında gerçekleşmiştir. Bosna-Hersek'in uluslararasılaşma çabaları, özellikle Erasmus olmak üzere AB programlarından ve ülkenin AB aday statüsü ve AB düzenlemeleriyle uyum çabalarından önemli ölçüde etkilenmiştir. Benzer şekilde, Kazakistan'da uluslararasılaşma, özellikle SSCB'nin dağılmasının ardından 2000'li yıllardan sonra daha belirgin hale gelmiştir. Bu süreç, Sovyet etkisinin azalmasıyla şekillenmiş ve AB, başlangıçtaki uluslararasılaşma faaliyetlerinde daha sınırlı bir rol oynamıştır. Buna karşılık, Çin'in en erken uluslararası faaliyetleri (katılımcı kurumlar arasında) 1990'ların ilk yarısına kadar uzanmaktadır. Çin'deki uluslararasılaşma çabaları 1980'lerden sonra daha yapılandırılmış hale gelmiş ve uluslararası ofisler ağırlıklı olarak 2000'lerden sonra kurulmuştur. Bosna-Hersek'in aksine, AB'nin Çin'in uluslararasılaşma süreçleri üzerinde fark edilebilir bir etkisi yoktur; bunun yerine ülkenin dışa açılma politikası ve "Çin'de Eğitim" ve 2010'lardan sonra başlatılan Konfüçyüs Enstitüleri gibi dışa dönük stratejiler tarafından şekillendirilmiştir.

Ayrıca, Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki vakaların ayrıntılı bir karşılaştırması, farklı ulusal bağlamların AB yüksek öğrenim politikalarının uygulanmasını ve değiştirilmesini nasıl etkilediğini de göstermektedir. Öncelikle, nitel veriler Bosna-Hersek'teki yükseköğretim manzarasının savaş sonrası yeniden yapılanma çabalarından ve karmaşık, çok düzeyli bir yönetim yapısından etkilendiğini doğrulamaktadır. Üniversitelerin uluslararasılaşma çabaları, parçalı düzenlemeler, kanton farklılıkları ve hükümet fonlarının eksikliği tarafından sınırlandırılmaktadır ve bu da onları başta özellikle AB programları olmak üzere dış kaynaklara yönelmeye itmektedir. 2003'ten beri olası bir AB aday ülkesi ve 2022'den beri resmi bir aday ülke olarak Bosna-Hersek, yükseköğretim reformlarını AB standartlarıyla uyumlu hale getirme çabasındadır. Erasmus+ ve Bologna Süreci gibi AB programlarına aktif katılım, Bosna-Hersek'in uluslararasılaşma çabalarının merkezinde yer almaktadır. Bologna Süreci'ne erken katılımları nedeniyle, Bosna-Hersek'teki yükseköğretim kurumları yapısal ve müfredat değişiklikleri açısından AB çerçevelerine nispeten alışkındır. Bosna-Hersek'ten katılımcılar çoğunlukla AB kredi

sistemlerini veya seçim kriterlerini uygulamada pek sorun yaşamadıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'nde ise AB girişimleri her zaman faaliyetlerinin merkezinde olmasa da, ülkenin Sovyet miraslarından stratejik olarak uzaklaşması ve müfredatı, yönetimi ve genel eğitim kalitesini modernize etme süreçlerine katkıda bulunmuştur. Diğer taraftan Kazakistanlı katılımcıların çoğunluğu, AB programlarına ek olarak kendi hükümet burslarının ve yerel fonlamanın da önemini vurgulamıştır. Yapı açısından, Kazakistan kurumları hem oldukça merkezi hem de daha ademi merkeziyetçi karar alma modellerini temsil etmektedir ve bu durum kurumsal özerklikte önemli farklılıklar gösteren bir manzarayı yansıtmaktadır. Kazakistan'da AB programlarının uygulanmasına ilişkin akademik uyumsuzluklar ve iletişim zorluklarından bahsedilmesine rağmen, önemli yasal veya bürokratik engeller bildirilmemiştir. Ayrıca, Kazakistan'daki Ulusal Erasmus+ Ofisi, rehberlik ve koordinasyon sağlama ve Erasmus programını aktif olarak teşvik etme anlamında önemle vurgulanan bir aktördür. Bosna-Hersek kurumlarına benzer şekilde, Kazakistan kurumları da Bologna Süreci'ne erken katılımları nedeniyle yapısal ve müfredat değişiklikleri açısından AB çerçevelerine nispeten alışkındır.

Son olarak, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nden elde edilen bulgular, önemli hükümet yatırımlarına ve 1980'lerden bu yana Çin'in yüksek öğrenim sisteminin açılmasına ve 2000'lerin başından bu yana uluslararasılaşmanın kurumsallaşmasına rağmen, hem kurumsal hem de ulusal stratejilerde AB programlarına ilişkin operasyonel bir aşinalığın hala eksik olduğunu ve Güneydoğu Asya gibi alternatif bölgesel odaklara sahip olduklarını göstermektedir. Diğer katılımcıların aksine, Çinli katılımcılar yalnızca teknik veya kurumsal zorluklardan ziyade Çin-AB ilişkileri ve ülkenin uluslararası imajı gibi sosyo-politik konulara da değinmiştir. Müfredat değişiklikleri (İngilizce verilen derslerin sayısının artırılması gibi) ve AB standartlarıyla uyum kabul edilmesine rağmen, katılımcılar bu tür değişiklikleri Çin'in muazzam ve yapısal olarak kendine özgü yükseköğrenim sisteminde uygulamaya koymanın büyük bir zorluk olacağını da belirtmektedir. Diğer ülkelerde olduğu gibi, uluslararası öğrenci sayısı ve iş birlikleri gibi niceliksel ölçütler üzerinde kurumsal ve ulusal otoritelerden gelen hafif bir baskının bulunduğu anlaşılmakta, ancak Çin'in merkezi hükümet sistemi göz

önüne alındığında bu baskının beklendiği kadar güçlü olmadığı görülmektedir. Katılımcıların çoğunluğunun sınırlı kullanılabilirliklerine rağmen hükümet burslarından bahsettiği Kazakistan'ın aksine, Çinli katılımcıların hiçbirinin ülkenin yükseköğrenime yaptığı önemli yatırımlardan veya uluslararası öğrencilere sunulan burslardan bahsetmemesi de şaşırtıcıdır. Benzer şekilde, Çin'in dünyanın en büyük ekonomilerinden biri olduğu, dışa odaklı uluslararasılaşma stratejisi, kendi burs programları ve yükseköğrenime yaptığı büyük yatırımlarla tanındığı düşünüldüğünde, kurumları AB programlarının bir parçası olmaya teşvik eden faktörlerden biri olarak finansal motivasyonun çok dile getirilmeyeceği beklenmiştir, ancak Çinli katılımcıların finansal motivasyonlardan da bahsettiği görülmüştür.

Son araştırma sorusu şudur: "Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki yükseköğretim kurumlarındaki UOP, AB yükseköğretim programlarını ve politikalarını kendi yerel ve kurumsal bağlamlarında nasıl algılar ve yorumlar?" Analiz, 3 ülke genelinde AB yükseköğretim programlarına yönelik farklı düzeylerde aşinalık ve operasyonel önemini ortaya koymaktadır. Bosna-Hersek'te, UOP AB programlarına son derece aşina görünmektedir ve Erasmus+ programları, uluslararası ofis faaliyetlerinin önemli bir bölümünü oluşturmaktadır. Benzer şekilde, Kazakistan Cumhuriyeti'ndeki katılımcılar programlar hakkında önemli ölçüde bilgi sahibidir, ancak programın operasyonel etkileri, bütçe kısıtlamaları ve ortak kurumlar tarafından belirlenen kotalar nedeniyle sınırlı görünmektedir. Buna karşılık, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ndeki kurumlar daha az aşinalık sergilemiş, yalnızca bir kurumun aktif olarak Erasmus+ hareketlilik programlarını yürüttüğü ve birkaç kurumun hareketlilik faaliyetlerinden ziyade Erasmus+ projelerine dahil olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Dolayısıyla Bosna-Hersek ve Kazakistan'daki UOP için AB programları bilinen ve değerli kaynaklar olarak algılanırken, Çin'deki UOP için nispeten yabancı, uzak ve daha az bütünleşik kalmaktadır.

Bu değişken aşinalığın, AB programlarının rolünü ve kurumsal uluslararasılaşma stratejilerine katkılarını da etkilediği görülmektedir. Bosna-Hersek'teki ve nispeten Kazakistan'daki yükseköğretim kurumlarının stratejik planlarında AB programlarına atıfta bulunulurken, Çin'deki kurumların stratejilerinde bu tür atıfların bulunmadığı anlaşılmıştır. Ayrıca, AB programlarına katılma motivasyonlarının analizi, UOP

tarafından belirtilen birincil itici güçler olarak finansal teşvikler, kurumsal hedefler (örneğin, kalite ve görünürlüğü iyileştirme) ve bireysel faydaları (örneğin, öğrenci istihdam edilebilirliğini artırma ve kültürlerarası becerileri teşvik etme) vurgulamaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, araştırma soruları kapsamındaki görüşme sonuçlarının analizinden elde edilen birincil argüman, UOP'nin kendi kurumları içinde AB yükseköğrenim programlarını aracılık etme ve uygulamada önemli bir rol oynadığıdır. Araştırma, UOP'nin yalnızca idari görevliler olmadığını, aynı zamanda AB girişimlerini yerel bağlamlarla yorumlayan, uyarlayan ve uyumlu hale getiren kritik aracılar olarak hareket ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. UOP'nin uzmanlıkları ve stratejik katılımları, Bosna-Hersek, Kazakistan ve Çin'deki yükseköğretim kurumlarının uluslararasılaşmasını kolaylaştırmak için esas olarak görünmektedir. AB politikaları ile yerel eğitim çerçeveleri arasındaki boşlukları kapatarak, UOP uluslararası programların başarılı bir şekilde entegre edilmesine önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, AB politikalarının uluslararasılaşma ve transfer süreçlerinin tek boyutlu veya yukarıdan aşağıya olmadığı da anlaşılmaktadır. Bunun yerine, UOP kritik, aşağıdan yukarıya bir arabulucu olarak hizmet etmektedir. Bu ofisler farklı yönetim modelleri altında faaliyet gösterse de (merkezi veya merkezsiz, yukarıdan aşağıya veya daha özerk), hepsi aynı AB çerçevesi içinde işlev görmekte ve bu da onları daha önemli yorumcular ve uygulayıcılar haline getirmektedir. UOP, AB politikalarını olduğu gibi uygulamak yerine yerel bağlamlarına uyarlayarak kurumsal ve bazen ulusal düzeydeki kararları şekillendirmede aşağıdan yukarıya, arabulucu bir rol oynamaktadır.

Benzer şekilde, bu tezin bir diğer temel argümanı, UOP'nin birden fazla ilişki seviyesinin birleştiği bir noktada faaliyet gösterdiğidir. Kurum içinde, üniversite liderliğine danışman olarak hareket ederek uluslararasılaşma çabalarını kurumsal hedeflerle bütünleştirmede rol oynamaktadırlar. Kurumlar arası olarak, hem yurtiçinde hem de yurtdışında diğer üniversitelerdeki meslektaşlarıyla iş birliği yapmakta, iyi uygulamaları paylaşmakta, ortaklıkları teşvik etmekte ve yatay politika öğrenme ağları kurmaktadırlar. Kurumsal düzeydeki kadar yaygın olmasa da, ulusal düzeyde, kurumsal stratejileri ulusal çerçevelerle uyumlu hale getirmek için politika yapıcılarla

etkileşime girmekte ve potansiyel olarak ulusal düzeydeki karar alma süreçlerini sınırlı da olsa etkilemektedirler. Son olarak, Avrupa düzeyinde, AB temsilcileriyle etkileşime girerek yerel uygulamalar ile Avrupa beklentileri arasındaki boşlukları kapatmaktadırlar.

Bu bağlamda, analiz ayrıca AB programlarının karar alma ve uygulama süreçlerinin tüm yönetim ve yetki düzeylerinde karşılıklı bir etkileşimle karakterize edildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu etkileşimin temelinde, uzmanlıkları ve operasyonel içgörüleri doğrudan kurumsal stratejileri ve politikaları etkileyen Uluslararası İlişkiler Ofisleri (ana analiz birimi) bulunmaktadır. Bunlar, sırasıyla, kurumsal yönetim ve üst yönetimin öncelikleri ve direktifleriyle kesişmektedir (orta düzey analiz). UOP, Daha geniş bir ölçekte ulusal otoriteler (üst düzey analiz) ve bölgesel veya uluslararası örgütler (üst düzey analiz) ile de etkileşime girerken aynı zamanda kurumsal ve yerel uyarlamalara da yanıt vermektedir. Bu çok düzeyli dinamik, karar almanın birbiriyle bağlantılı doğasını vurgulamakta; burada her düzey diğerlerindeki süreçleri şekillendirmekte ve yönetişim yelpazesi boyunca iş birliğinin ve uyumun önemini göstermektedir.

Ayrıca, çalışma, kurumsal özerklik, ulusal politika ortamları ve AB eğitim standartlarıyla uyum derecesi gibi faktörlerden etkilenen 3 ülke genelindeki UOP'nin rolleri ve etkililiğindeki farklılıkları tanımlamaktadır. Her üç durumda da UOP, üniversitelerinin uluslararasılaşma stratejilerinin bir parçası olarak AB programlarının başarısı için ayrılmaz bir parça olsa da, etki ve uzmanlıklarının kapsamı kurumsal kapasitelere, ulusal yönetim yapılarına ve AB ile tarihsel ilişkilere bağlı olarak değişmektedir. Örneğin, Bosna-Hersek'teki UOP, ülkenin AB adaylık statüsü nedeniyle AB çerçeveleriyle güçlü bir uyum sergilerken, Kazakistan'daki UOP, AB odaklı girişimleri yerel önceliklerle dengelemede daha fazla özerklik göstermektedir. Çin'de ise odak, AB programlarına daha az vurgu yapılarak ulusal stratejilere kaymaktadır. Yükseköğretim sistemlerinin Bologna Süreci ile uyumlu reformlardan geçtiği Bosna-Hersek ve Kazakistan'da, UOP, AB programlarını ulusal politikalarla sentezlemede etkili olmuştur. Buna karşılık, yükseköğretim sisteminin Avrupa modelinden belirgin şekilde farklı olduğu Çin'de, UOP, AB programlarından ilham almaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, bu tezin bulguları doğrultusunda, UOP'ni hedefli mesleki gelişim ve artan kurumsal destek yoluyla güçlendirmenin AB yükseköğretim programlarının uygulanmasını ve etkinliğini artırabileceği ileri sürülmektedir. UOP'nin kritik rolünü kabul ederek ve güçlendirerek, hem AB hem de katılımcı ülkelerin politika transferlerini kolaylaştırabileceği, potansiyel politik ve kurumsal engelleri aşabileceği ve daha etkili uluslararasılaşma sonuçları elde edebileceği anlaşılmaktadır.

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