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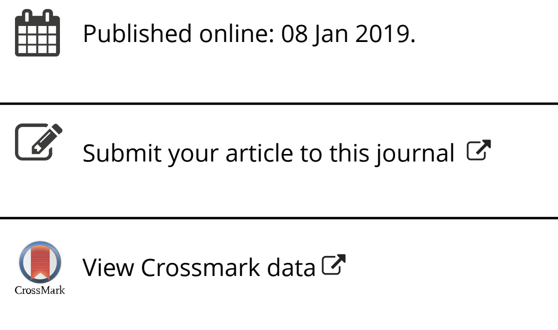

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The Bologna Process: an international higher education regime

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ABSTRACT

The Bologna Process and the ensuing establishment of the European Higher Education Area has had an impact on the ways in which higher education in Europe operates, and the ways it is perceived and related to in countries and regions outside Europe. The Bologna Process has come to symbolize a form of international cooperation in higher education policy, not only in Europe, but all over the world. In this article, we discuss the Bologna Process as a system of international coordination; or, in the jargon of international relations, as a 'regime'. The article traces the features and methods enabling the Bologna model and their diffusion outside Europe. This perspective offers a useful contribution to the understanding of the Bologna Process as constituting a foreign policy tool for the EU. Moreover, the realization that an international regime can become a player with a life of its own, with an independent influence on the international system, allows us to draw conclusions about the forces that govern the regime, and their international power.

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Introduction

Twenty years after the launch of the Bologna Process (BP), higher education (HE) systems in Europe and throughout the world have become better coordinated, more harmonious, and more effective. The BP has had a deep impact on the ways in which HE operates, is perceived, and is shaped. While initially sparking significant debates over its applicability, over the years, the BP has come to symbolize a form of international cooperation in HE policy, not only in Europe but all over the world, as an inspiring success of joint and mutually accepted policy.[1]

In this article, we discuss the BP as a system of international coordination; or, in the jargon of international relations, as a 'regime'. With the aim of qualifying the BP as an international regime, the article traces the features which enabled it to diffuse not only within but also outside Europe. We assume that although the BP was established to provide a solution for internal European problems, it sparked interest outside Europe, affecting the global sphere of HE. The international dimension of the BP is examined

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through the prism of regime theory, with the objective to determine whether the BP suits the definition of an 'international regime'.

Through an analysis of the BP's cooperation mechanisms, an examination of its establishment and institutionalization, and by tracing its stages of development, this paper sheds light on the forces behind it and allows inferences about the role of its participants in general, and its leaders in particular (i.e. the EU), as international players. Moreover, the realization that an international regime can become a player with a life of its own, with an independent influence on the international system, allows us to draw conclusions about the forces that govern the regime, inasmuch as they increase their international power as well as those that govern the international arrangements promoted by the regime.

To examine the compatibility of the BP with the definition of an international regime, the article begins with a discussion of the various conceptual assumptions of regime theory. The article then elaborates on the methodological tools chosen for the research. The following section opens an empirical discussion, tracing the conceptualization of the BP as an international regime. Lastly, the paper discusses the implications of the findings for regime theory and international HE cooperation.

Regime theory as a theoretical framework

Regime theory serves as a theoretical framework for a discussion of various phenomena in international relations (Adler and Haas 1992; Litfin 1994), including those related to HE. This study is not the first to link the term 'regime' to the BP (Do Amaral 2010, 57; Karseth 2006, 266). However, its innovation lies in its reliance on an international relations perspective, offering a comprehensive examination of the BP through the conceptual lens of international regimes. The paper does not address the changes that the BP promotes in pedagogy or teaching, as others have done (Klemenčič 2017), but focuses instead on the fact that countries adopt or are affected by an external policy formulated intentionally, accompanied by the development of a web of international relationships and the furtherance of the activity of pan-European organizations and institutions.

Despite the great diversity in the literature as to the definition of 'international regime' (Haggard and Simmons 1987, 493–494; Keohane 1984, 57; Puchala and Hopkins 1982, 247; Ruggie 1975, 570–571; Strange 1975, 219; Young 1980, 331, 1982, 278, 1992, 44), the definition with the broadest acceptance in the academic community seems to be Krasner's. Krasner's definition sees an international regime as 'implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations' (Krasner 1982, 186).

In an era of decentralized global governance, the need for recognition and for greater trust increases, both among actors themselves and between actors and governance structures. This sense of trust is key to the existence of global order, because of the large degree of players' mutual influence on one other (Keohane and Nye 2001, 7). As the players are increasingly commited to the international rules of conduct, trust increases, since it is based on mutuality (Keohane 1984, 214; Nikolaidis and Shaffer 2005, 264–266). Regimes, in this sense, are the instruments that formalize mutual relations and maintain trust on the international level.

The advent of an international regime entails the redesign of the political reality in a particular field and the creation of an international institution that did not exist beforehand. Regimes can be formed in three ways (Young 1982, 282–285):

(1) *Spontaneous regimes* are the product of the action of many players, without any organized direction (Hayek 1973, 37).
(2) In *negotiation-based regimes*, institutions are created on the basis of a document signed by the parties that details the agreements about mutual expectations, enforcement arrangements, and the like (Young 1982, 282–285).
(3) *Forced regimes* involve institutions created to fulfil the interests of one player (or a coalition of players) that has the power to obligate other players to comply (Ibid).

In order to understand how regimes are created and how they operate, in light of the typology cited above, we should look at the regime leadership that steers international cooperation. This can be divided into two ideal types (Young and Osherenko 1993, 235): structural leadership and intellectual leadership.

Structural leadership constructs the power relations in a regime in a way that benefits a particular player or coalition of players. As such, it reproduces the power relations external to the regime within its very structure. Structural leadership emphasises that international regimes have the normative and ethical ability to exert influence as if they were autonomous actors; they and their bureaucracy can be seen as creating tools for governance and social construction (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 700).

Intellectual leadership utilizes relative knowledge available to specific players who seek to adapt the topics on the global agenda to their benefit. This leadership exploits the knowledge at its disposal as an advantage over the other players that lack it, whether as a way to present matters, to set the agenda, or to propose solutions or ideological innovations (Moravcsik 1999, 272).

There are three major stages in the creation of an international regime: setting an agenda; institutional choice; and the active or operational stage. The first stage, *setting an agenda*, begins with the awakening of a common political need or topic that confronts the players with a problem the solution of which relies on the joint effort of many players. At this stage, the players meet in forums to consult and understand the topic in depth (Levy, Young, and Zurn 1995, 282–283). The players engage in overt or behind-the-scenes negotiations among a limited number of players, at whose end there usually emerges a general document that explains why a new regime is necessary (Scott 2010, 164).

The stage of *institutional choice* begins the moment the players agree that the problem is important enough and that a solution must be found for it. At this stage, a multi-member committee is created to produce the final declaratory document. This is when the new entity's procedures of operation and rules of governance are defined. At the end of this stage, the declaration or convention is signed; in practice this marks the official establishment of the regime.

The *operational* stage includes everything achieved in the framework of the regime from the moment its founding declaration/convention is signed. This stage is not limited in time and includes whatever changes the regime undergoes until it ceases to exist, such as adding or dropping members or altering its fields of activity. This breakdown into stages is not absolute (Levy, Young, and Zurn 1995, 282–283). From the moment it is

formed, the regime must acquire international recognition and legitimacy. Thus, the power of an international regime stems from two sources: its structural legitimacy, in order to implement the purpose for which it was first created; and the unique competences or expertise of certain of its members. As a result of these two sources, the international regime evolves into an autonomous domain of activity, which in turn influences international actors (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 707).

The question of regime effectiveness can be broken down into several levels and measures. In the first stage, the general success and effectiveness can be measured on the basis of two criteria: a regime is considered to be effective if: a. its members adhere to its laws and rules; b. it accomplishes the goal for which it was established (Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger 1997, 2). Breitmeier, Young and, Zurn expanded this above discussion, asserting that the effectiveness of a regime should be examined on three different levels: its results: the creation of a concrete and functional institutional mechanism; its product: changes in the players' conduct, in light of the regime's rules; and its influence: in terms of the status of the problem for which the regime was placed on the agenda, changes in its definition, its solution, and the like (Breitmeier, Young, and Zurn 2006, 7). An effective regime can thus be understood as one that has clear rules, agreement about the symbolic meaning of its rules, and a structure that reflects its ideological principles (Franck 1990, 184).

Methodology

In order to classify the BP and the EHEA as a regional/international higher-education regime, two core questions should be considered:

(1) What is the political mechanism that enables the EU to exert power in the field of HE outside its borders?
(2) Is the BP an international reference point for HE policy?

In an effort to validate the assertion that the BP fits the definition of an 'international regime', the research relies on the protocol and database established by Breitmeier, Young and Zurn for the study of international regimes (Breitmeier, Young, and Zurn 2006). The International Regime Database (IRD) was formed in order to overcome methodological problems related to the study of international regimes, such as the inability to define a clear set of variables to define systematic international cooperation as 'regime', the limitations posed by comparing regimes of various types, and the determination of a regime's effectiveness)9–11). This database relies on a questionnaire that identifies, defines and grades characteristics and variables which can be used to consistently define international collaborations as 'international regimes'. The weighting of these grades makes it possible to define existing collaborations as regimes (23). The protocol is divided into four groups according to a thematic breakdown of a regime's features: the design of the public agenda that led to its establishment; the mode of its creation; its activity vis-à-vis its institutional structure; the dynamic that prevails among its members; its products; and the international influence stemming from its activity.

This paper adapts the IRD methodology by providing qualitative answers to its questions rather than relying on the coding mechanism it developed. This is because the

study does not seek to evaluate the BP or compare it to other regimes in the field of HE (if such exist), but to show that it is in fact a regime. In other words, the questions are not meant to provide indicators for measurement, but to serve as a guideline for defining the BP as an international regime. As such, this study turns the logic of the IRD protocol on its head. Whereas the protocol was designed to identify a regime's pattern of conduct (real or imagined) and only then to address its power centres, this paper begins by identifying the power and then explains it on the basis of regime theory.[2]

The Bologna Process: an International Higher Education Regime

The Bologna Process and the international agenda

The first set of questions outlined in the IRD (the 100 Questions) deals with the stages in which regimes are created and focuses on the forces leading to the creation of the regime, the negotiations among the players before the regime is established, and the initial stages of its establishment. These questions seek to identify the actors who set up the regime and their incentives for doing so.

Recognizant of the low compatibility among national HE systems in Europe, the founders of the BP, understood that the creation of a common basis would not be sufficient to achieve a minimal compatibility. It would also be necessary to ensure a basic level of mutual trust. This meant that it was preferable to base the new process on existing conventions and on international entities having already addressed topics related to mutual recognition of academic degrees and professional training programmes – the Council of Europe and UNESCO (Reinalda and Kulesza-Mietkowski 2005, 53–54).

Along with the four founding states (Germany, Britain, Italy, and France), several 'supranational' organizations participated in the creation of the EHEA: UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Students' Union (ESU), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), and the International Association of Universities (IAU). The Council of Europe served as matchmaker, providing the institutional and technical framework for launching the process. In the language of regime theory, this conglomerate can be referred to as a 'hegemonic actor', as the founding member states and entities set the agenda, which was promoted via a campaign of persuasion (Rüttgers 2013) throughout the European continent.

The role of the EU specifically in setting the agenda should be highlighted. In the initial stages, the EU was an unofficial but active player; it was not until 2001, two years after the process was officially launched, that the EU received 'full membership' status. In the first years of the process, the EU helped fund the work of the non-governmental organizations promoting the process (ESU and EUA), because the goals of the BP coincided with the EU's education policy and the economic agenda published in 2000-the Lisbon Strategy (Reinalda and Kulesza-Mietkowski 2005, 43).

As the BP developed, and in view of its potential to overcome bureaucratic obstacles hindering Europe's ambition to become the 'most competitive knowledge economy in the world', the EU took the reins and assumed sponsorship of the process. Some would go so far as to say that the European Commission 'hijacked' the process (Tomusk 2004, 85). As realization of the process's significance increased, and the complexity of its

implementation and management became clearer, the leadership role of the Council of Europe decreased, because it did not have the material and administrative resources to manage the process effectively (Braband 2011, 11). The need for a strong effective leadership (Haskell 2009, 274), was filled by the EU, after its Commission was admitted as a full member in 2001; since then the EU has been the Process's unofficial leader (both ideologically and organizationally) as well as its main source of funding.

As noted, international regimes are not just made up of a collection of laws, but are in fact arenas in which officials, government entities, NGOs, and international organizations increase their influence on the international community, despite the lack of legislative authority to influence decision-makers in sovereign states. The tools available to the EU as a hegemonic and leading player in the regime, are its ability to act as the 'policy entrepreneur' for policy that is advanced by a multilateral international dialogue, while the international 'leadership authority' stems from the ideological legitimacy it enjoys (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 704–706; Moravcsik 1999, 268).

The BP initially appeared to be a technical reform intended to eliminate bureaucratic obstacles that hindered international mobility. Yet, it also has a deep political dimension, especially in light of the fact that HE is a growth engine on which knowledge-based economies depend. The motivations behind the internationalization of HE as part of the BP can be attributed to three spheres: *cultural,* with the aim of facilitating the construction of a separate European identity as part of Europe's efforts to define the 'European citizen'; *economic,* to make Europe more attractive in the international competition around HE, while catalyzing its transition to a knowledge-based economy; and *political,* as a tool to bolster the EU's efforts to amass regional and international power (Robertson 2006, 29). The BP thus fosters a consensual discourse that links the social, economic, and political domains, as higher-education policy is formed at three different levels simultaneously – the national and local, the European and regional, and the international and global.

On a national level, each member country furthers its own interests in the direction of modernization and flexibility so that it will be able to act in an entrepreneurial-technological environment and in an economically effective manner. On a regional and European level, the European Commission became the main actor in the BP (despite the fact that on the surface it is an intergovernmental process that does not fall under the aegis of the EU), because the Commission sees the Process as part of the Lisbon Strategy (Scott 2007, 66–67). The various actions undertaken as part of the BP indeed represent a regional and European goal of strengthening social, political, and economic forces. But their influence does not stop at Europe's borders and effectively serve as an international and global innovation (Kwiek 2004, 759), which marks the transition to the third level, on which the BP functions as an intergovernmental mechanism for non-European countries that express their desire to learn about and even join it the process. The fact that the BP is influential on these three levels at one and the same time, thanks to the involvement of experts as well as both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, makes it an epistemic community with a significant influence (Friedman 2017, 120). The good that emerges from the BP is international; all entities interested in international higher-education policy can benefit from it, even if they are not members of the Process. We can say, then, that the BP created an international public good.

When HE is discussed as a public good, there is a tendency to relate to education as the good itself. A look at the BP and the international dynamic it created permits its classification as a different type of public good: the good created by the BP as a regime is not HE itself, but its *infrastructure* and *language*. These elements support the internationalization of HE by stating clear rules of conduct that can be adopted independently by all states and institutions in order to implement their own goals for HE. This is relevant for both member and non-member countries, a scheme that allows the characteristics of Bologna as public good to cross European borders and be applied internationally.

The public good created by the BP is not a national public good that benefits a particular population but an international one, which can be enjoyed throughout Europe and beyond. Using the terms of regime theory, one can assert that Europe is the hegemon that contributes to the creation of the regime and the promotion of the international public good: a uniform pedagogical and administrative language that facilitates international academic collaboration. The BP does help Europe garner prestige and importance in the world of HE, but Europe is not the only actor that benefits from it; countries outside Europe also show interest in the Process and study the policy tools it developed, even though they can act independently from it. Thus, the public good offered by the BP regime, is a framework for international academic cooperation, which works to promote the economic interests of the EU.

The institutionalization and operation of the Bologna Process

The IRD's second set of questions (the 200 Questions) focuses on the characteristics of the regime that make it unique. This section seeks to determine the regime's principles, values, norms, and decision-making rules by examining documents, protocols, and conventions associated with the regime in order to trace its normative, ideological, and administrative elements.

The BP is based on the idea that the individual behaviour of a state actor cannot enable it to compete optimally with its rivals. Competition in the HE arena has many costs, demands administrative expertise, and requires an actor to offer an appropriate and attractive alternative to its competitors. The BP is a regime that seeks to minimize the chaos in international HE and lead to collaboration in the name of better competition. The participants are aware that this type of collaboration has costs (such as the loss of national academic traditions) and also recognize the power differentials between them, but nevertheless opt for membership in view of the future benefits, or at the very least in order to avoid the potential loss they would incur if they remained outside it.

The BP players are not hostile to one other, making it difficult to classify their academic competition as an 'arms race', as is often invoked to explain regime stability. It is evident, however, that the BP endeavours to strengthen trust among the players. Some have gone so far as to term that EHEA a 'zone of mutual trust' (Coles and Oates 2005, 13). This assertion is further validated by the document written by the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) for the ministerial meeting in Bergen 2005 (Bologna Process 2005a). The document reviews the institutional development of the BP, which began as an inter-governmental cooperation that relied on the support of the scientific and academic community and of students. According to the BFUG, the process is based on mutual trust among members, creating an association of different partners, that are not

committed to collaboration by any law, aside from the agreement to abide by the Lisbon Convention (Council of Europe 1997) when it comes to recognition of previous studies and coursework (Bologna Process 2005a, 2). These definitions allow us to view the idea of the BP as an international collaboration based on *mutual trust* as more precise. This is an essential condition for classifying international collaboration as a regime.

The issue of mutual trust must be considered in light of the conditions for participation in the regime, since trust among the players depends first and foremost on the question of who is collaborating with whom. The literature identifies two types of regimes, as a function of the rules for admission: a *closed regime*, which is an exclusive club like NATO or the EU; and an *open international framework* that every state is welcome to join, such as the IMF or GATT (Levy, Young, and Zurn 1995, 276). The BP is an interesting example in which the two forms of admission coexist: the terms for inclusion in the BP were defined explicitly at the ministerial meeting in Bergen (Bologna Process 2005b), namely, that joining the BP was contingent on signing the European Cultural Convention and membership in the Council of Europe. In 2010, an additional item was added to the terms for admission, that a state interested in joining must provide information on the actions it will take in order to introduce the Bologna reforms to its HE system (Bologna Process 2016). This clause also relates to the need to increase the level of trust among the players. However, in view of the regime's evolution from a regional to an international regime, the terms for joining (even in not full membership in) the Process were loosened: countries that are not members of the Process are invited to participate in the Bologna Policy Fora (BPF), the Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE), and in other projects associated with the Tempus/ Erasmus+ programme, which are aimed at promoting compatibility with the EHEA.

Thus, the BP can be classified as a living and expanding regime in terms of both content and geography. Its dynamism is expressed in the expansion of the number of 'action lines'[3] from six to ten; the increase in the number of member states to 48; the establishment of collaboration frameworks with regions and states that cannot take on 'official' membership in the process; the association of the process with parallel developments (such as the Lisbon Strategy); and the success of the BP in establishing a sustainable decision-making mechanism of based on a strong secretariat (Cox and Jacobson 1973). All these reflect the fact that the regime is not a 'dead letter' regime but an active and influential entity.

The BP complies with the definition of a regime not only with regards to the establishment stage and its unique characteristics, it also passes the test of power and effectiveness. The BP satisfies the four most basic criteria for a regime: clear rules; the players' agreement on the symbolic meaning of the rules; a clear structure of rules; and a clear and direct connection between the rules and the regime's ideological principles, which forge the normative commitment underlying compliance with the regime (Franck 1990, 184). Because it defines ten clear and measurable action lines that function as norms of conduct for many national higher-education systems, the BP can be considered a strong regime according to Keohane's metrics, by which a strong and effective regime is one that creates a clear set of rules to cover a wide range of activities related to its domain (Keohane 1993, 41).

The BP and decision-making surrounding it, operates according to the standard directives and modes of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which is the

governance and management tool employed by the EU and its institutions (Laffan and Shaw 2005, 1; Lisbon European Council 2000, par. 37; Schäfer 2004, 12). The application of the OMC to the BP as well as to the Lisbon Strategy can be seen as linking the two in an essential manner and reducing the potential resistance by states had the BP been backed by a rigid enforcement mechanism. The link between the BP and the OMC, despite the difference in their final objectives, promotes a process of Europeanisation. This process seeks 'to retain a formative influence in shaping the Knowledge Society at a moment when geopolitics are moving out for the first time in three hundred years from the North Atlantic to the Pacific Rim' (Neave 2005, 19). In addition, the Europeanisation process incorporates economic and social dimensions expressed by the European reform in HE (Neave 2005, 19; Van der Wende and Huisman 2004, 2; Veiga and Amaral 2006, 283).

The OMC fills a key role in the BP: it allows the European Commission to control and coordinate the objectives of several nation-states' higher-education systems, despite its lack of legislative authority to intervene in higher-education policy; it links the Commission's economic objectives as defined in the Lisbon Strategy with the BP, while creating a procedural connection between the two; and it supports the complex coordination between the EU states and the other members of the EHEA; and in effect it gives the European Commission a spatial influence that extends beyond the borders of the EU.

The spheres of influence of the Bologna Process

The questions in the third group of the IRD (the 300 Questions) deal with the regime's influence (local and international); that is, its output and its ability to effect actual impacts. These questions can be divided into three aspects through which effectiveness can be defined: 'compliance', 'achievement of the regime's goal', and the 'solution of problems'. The fourth group of questions (the 400 Questions) focuses on a regime's dynamics – the internal processes it undergoes from the moment they are established until their demise, as well as the forces (internal and external) that act on them. These questions are strongly influenced by circumstances, but they have the ability to offer a theoretical explanation of why an international collaboration developed as it did.

The potential impact of the BP is defined in its action lines. The attempt to track the development of the action lines of the BP is not as simple as may be expected. From the various official documents published since 1999 it is impossible to identify a uniform attitude to the action lines of the Process, which is why they have been described in such different ways, including the 'Bologna/EHEA principles, objectives, standards, rules, regulations, and even action lines' (Zgaga 2012, 17). Noteworthy is the fact that the disparate references to the essence of the process, its action lines, justify the assertion that the BP is an international regime. This is because the various terms employed together make up the accepted definition of an international regime, as 'principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area' (Krasner 1982, 186). Therefore, even though it had not yet been defined as such, we can see that over the years the attitude to the BP was de facto as to an international regime.

This leads to the question as to whether there is a philosophical concept underlying the BP. Is there an ethical backbone that regulates the diffusion of the process (geographically

and substantively) and its transformation into an international regime? The bologna principles (action lines)

> may be procedural but also substantive; they can either be deducted from the real world or agreed among people (nations); in the latter meaning, they can function as a fundamental truth and/or a motivating force. They can justify the ruling opinion or form a doctrine. (Zgaga 2012, 17)

In reality, although the Bologna principles were clearly defined, different members may (and did) interpret their application in different manners, creating variation and flexibility (Frankowitz 2012). According to Zgaga, the source of power of the BP lies in the fuzziness of the application of its principles, which allows member countries a wide range for action, but also a common agreed base of social and political action (Zgaga 2012, 17–19).

The BP is an agreed-upon basis for international action; and even though its principles are formulated in general terms and subject to interpretation, normative pressure and expectations of mutual activity by all its member states are created, and these increase as additional states join the process or emulate it. The demand that HE 'should be principled: based on propositions that provide primary ideal goals' (Furedy 2000, 44), is addressed by the BP, which is anchored in agreed-upon principles and set action lines, defined in a signed compact, 'rooted in a particular European context' (Zgaga 2012, 18). Thus, the 1999 Bologna Declaration is an ethical statement that defines the states' commitment to achieve their mutual vision – the creation of the EHEA.

The principles of the BP can be traced back to the Sorbonne Declaration (1998)[4] and even to the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988). Its authors in 1999 did not see it appropriate to precisely define the clear principles of the BP and the EHEA. From a historical perspective, one can see how the BP was transformed from a reform focused on particular issues such as degree credits and the use of learning outputs, into a tool that helps articulate a broader policy, even as the discourse was increasingly focused on general and broad topics such as 'the social dimension' and the 'global strategy' (Croiser and Parveva 2013, 81).

We can assert that the authors of the declaration did not foresee the regime character of the process they launched but saw it as simply an instrumental reform defined in exclusively technical 'action lines'. We can also assert that the principles of the BP are normative aspirations (Zgaga 2012, 19) set post factum after the international success of the BP and after its regime character became evident.

An overview of the history of the BP reveals that its principles and action lines proliferated from one ministerial meeting to the next, as did the list of member states. As the Process expanded and spread, the language used to refer to it changed as well, and the Process was transformed from an instrumental reform to one with a deeper ethical meaning – a regime.

Starting in 2005, a clear separation was created between the ten 'action lines' of the BP and its principles, because the action lines stem from a clear ethical and normative foundation based on mutual trust (European Parliament 2012, Bul. 8). With the inclusion of new elements, such as the definition of its 'social dimension' (Lourtie 2001, 2), an ethical ground was added to those vague principles that became the 'Bologna philosophy' (Zgaga 2012) that is diffusing throughout the world.

Pavel Zgaga identifies the evolution of the main principles of the BP by periods (Zgaga 2012, 27–29). He adds an additional principle to the apex of its pyramid of principles, without which the process cannot survive: a partnership among the authorities, institutions, student organizations, and the various entities involved in the process (29). The very search for clear principles to sketch boundaries for the process corroborates the assertion that the BP is an international regime with mutual expectations, principles, rules, and procedures valid not only with the European continent but also globally (30).

In this regard, it should be highlighted that the EU takes an active political step when it breaks out of the European boundaries of the BP and develops into new spaces that will adapt their systems of HE to comply with the BP. Examples of this can be seen in the various projects for mutual recognition of academic credits and training programmes by the EHEA and other countries and regions.

From an overarching perspective, one can see how the BP adapts itself to the conditions that processes in various regions of the world impose on it, and even exploits them to its benefit. In this sense, there is no doubt that the leadership of the Process understood its role as the main policy entrepreneur in the field of HE and began relating to the process as a player with an independent existence and real power. Thus, ministerial statements such as 'the EHEA has a key role', 'the EHEA faces serious challenges', or 'the EHEA has opened a dialogue with other regions' (EHEA 2015), can be understood as referring to the BP as an autonomous entity. The BP functions independently, led and directed in light of the EU's agenda, moving to establish interregional collaboration in HE in which the EU is a central and hegemonic player.

The interest, response, and reactions of non-European countries to developments occurring in the EHEA (which will be further developed and examined in other chapters of this volume) are evidence of Europe's success as a global power. The introduction of reforms (which seem to be instrumental) leads to a fundamental assimilation of the values and principles that underlie the process. In this way, the diffusion of the BP outside the borders of the EHEA is evidence that Europe not only seeks to be the central player in the field, but even to shape the arena in its own image.

Discussion

The ambition to forge a cosmopolitan European citizen who moves freely across the continent, as well as Europe's aim to become the most competitive knowledge economy in the world, remain at the top of the EU's priorities. These aspirations and desires often run into bureaucratic obstacles and technical barriers stemming from the diversity in the format and structure of national systems of HE. The realization that these problems could be solved by the creation of a framework for international cooperation was the spark that triggered the founding of the EHEA and launching of the BP. This article has tried to show how the BP was institutionalized as an international regime, from the realization of the need for a cooperation mechanism in HE to its transformation into a global and international regime.

By creating a framework that permits the consolidation of an international epistemic community, the EU advanced from being a bench player in the Process to the star that leads and guides the regime. We have observed the regime's coalescence as an institution, progressing from a local European reform to an entity that sets the standard rules of

conduct for the international level. In addition, we saw that the public good the regime achieves is not HE itself, but the *infrastructure* that supports the internationalization of HE on the basis of the ethical principles that make up the 'Bologna philosophy' – a world-view based on distinctly European values.

Even though the international system of HE is decentralized and anarchic, the European humanistic tradition, which sanctifies the academic freedom to investigate and express oneself without bias or favouritism, serves as the common ethical basis of all the institutions. For many years, academic institutions functioned alongside one another and even collaborated on specific topics, both research and teaching, based on a commitment to shared core values; in the language of regime theory this demonstrates collaboration in anarchic conditions. Without a 'global police officer' to act as a regulator, the HE systems, as self-help systems, created a work environment that enables international collaboration with systems of similar value and structure. As long as academia was an elitist system that served as an agent of national socialization, funded by the government, on the one hand, and was not threatened by external competition, on the other hand, the need for such a regulatory body did not arise.

But things changed. The social and economic globalization of the twenty-first century required universities to produce generations of graduates qualified to function in a *competitive global* environment. These global trends began to dictate a new agenda for HE, seen as a tool for economic development and growth. This led to significant transformations in academia and its institutions, as well as to changes in the mode of academic governance.

The fact that the BP is a successful international collaboration based on a voluntary and non-binding agreement, is decisive for its classification as an *international regime*. From the point of view of regime theory, the BP serves as a self-restraint mechanism which players take upon themselves, because they understand that international collaboration and its regulation by an outside entity is the solution that enables the realization of academia's role in the age of globalization. The merger of interests of the various players involved in HE (students, institutions, nation-states, and the EU itself), highlights the vacuum the EU filled as a policy entrepreneur, in that it successfully orchestrates a system of international governance and coordination that is an effective mechanism for dealing with an international challenge.

It follows that the classification of the BP as a regime has a far-reaching consequence: the BP has a concentric influence on states and regions that are not part of the EHEA; so, accordingly, does the EU itself, as the leader of the regime. The fact that states and regions discuss the BP, volunteer to take part in it, adopt its elements (even if only in part), and even apply its rules without being asked or required to do so, proves that it is a political process with normative elements. In other words, *the BP can be seen as an international regime, inasmuch as it leads to the expression of principles, norms, rules, and procedures of decision-making around which the expectations of players in higher education and international academic collaboration can coalesce.*

The BP, as a regime, has undergone several incarnations, so it is difficult to classify it clearly as with one of the three types of regimes. A review of the development of the regime, starting with the birth of the idea in the 1990s, shows that the BP first appeared spontaneously as a local collaboration by four education ministers, with no clear guiding hand. With the spread of the idea, the broadening of the circles of participation,

and the improvement of the institutional mechanism, the regime evolved into a negotiation-based regime: the drafting and signing of the Bologna Declaration, the further international negotiations about the scope and application of the Declaration, and the articulation of the terms for joining the club all reveal the political nature of the BP as a negotiation-based regime. Ever since the EU entered the picture and became the main player in the Process, another substantive transformation arose: the consolidation of the global strategy of the BP. This along with the clear linkage the EU made between the Lisbon Strategy and the process shows how the regime became a 'forced regime', no longer a spontaneous collaboration but rather an institution that implements the interests of the hegemon on the international scale.

In this sense the EU displays both types of regime leadership: it provides *structural leadership* in that it molds the BP in its image as a tool to promote regional integration by replicating its power and internal policy in the Process; it also provides *intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership* by exploiting the weaker players' deficiency of organizational ability and knowledge in order to set the agenda according to its needs and to develop policy tools that will promote its own policy. Thus, since the initial stages of the process (and more so since 2001, when it became a full partner), the EU drives the BP and defines problems the regime must deal with, sets the agenda, and proposes solutions. In addition, it is the main funder of the BP and its means of diffusion, using the local lack of organizational ability and knowledge in order to introduce its policies in non-European regions and states.[5] As a regime, the BP succeeds in promoting international cooperation in HE, because its tools and policy clarify the mutual expectations of all the players, reduce the costs of repeated collaboration, create previously nonexistent knowledge, and forge the illusion of the shadow of the future that perpetuates the collaboration.

We have seen that the BP is an effective regime; not only has it been successful in establishing the Higher Education Area for which it was created, it also induces its members, as well as nonmember players, to study its rules and comply with them when they come in contact with it. This ability provides strong evidence that the EU possesses 'normative power' (Manners 2002) that leads other players to follow its lead, viewing it as a model. By creating a supranational framework, with the nature of a regime, the EU became a major axis of inter-regional ties in HE; or, in the language of regime theory, a hegemon.

Notes

1. Nevertheless, still today there is critique on the implementation of the BP and its consequences in different settings (Guccio, Martorana, and Monaco 2016; Soltys 2015; Wihlborg and Teelken 2014).
2. This reversal is why the protocol's instructions are altered in our methodology.
3. The Bologna action lines are commonly agreed Bologna objectives, many times referred as the fundamental items on which the EHEA is based (Zgaga 2012, 18).
4. From the Bologna Declaration: '[w]hile affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne Declaration […].'
5. An excellent example of this mode of conduct is provided by a memorandum published by the European Commission in 2013, 'European Higher Education in the World' (European Commission 2013, 14). Here it explains its mode of action and policy with regard to the operation of the Bologna Process as part of the EU's economic policy and sets forth its concept of the appropriate mode of international action in a way that emphasises the EU's place as an intellectual and entrepreneurial leader.

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