THE
BOLOGNA
REFORM IN UKRAINE

LEARNING EUROPEANISATION IN
THE POST-SOVIET CONTEXT

IRYNA KUSHNIR

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The Bologna Reform in Ukraine: Learning Europeanisation in the Post-Soviet Context

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to my parents.

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Table of Contents

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List of Tables and Figures

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List of Acronyms

BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EU	European Union
HERE	Higher Education Reform Expert
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TEMPUS	Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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About the Author

Dr Iryna Kushnir is currently a Senior Lecturer in Education Studies at Nottingham Trent University. She previously worked at the University of Sheffield and the University of Edinburgh. Dr Kushnir's research in the area of sociology of education combines the following main interdisciplinary angles: higher education, education policy, Europeanisation, internationalisation and post-Soviet transition. Her interdisciplinary approach has led to empirical and theoretical contributions, which reveal how education policy on one hand and wider societal process of internationalisation on the other hand are interrelated and mutually shape one another.

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Preface

This book explores the process of the Bologna reform in the Ukrainian higher education system, particularly focusing on the period between the start of the reform in Ukraine in 2004 through a Bologna pilot project, which turned into a nation-wide reform in 2005 – all the way until 2014. The book also considers higher education developments in the country prior to the start of the Bologna reform – since Ukraine gained its independence in August 1991. Bologna is one of the most well-known and influential European projects for cooperation in the field of higher education. It aims to create an internationally competitive European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through a range of such objectives as the adoption of a system of credits, cycles of study process, diploma supplement, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, student-centred education, lifelong learning and the promotion of student and faculty mobility. Through an in-depth examination of higher education actors and policy instruments in the case of the implementation of Bologna in Ukraine, this book aims to (1) analyse the process of the Bologna reform in Ukraine and (2) examine Bologna as a case of Europeanisation in the post-Soviet context. This analysis is based on interviews with key policy actors and text analysis of selected policy documents.

The book suggests that the Bologna reform in Ukraine primarily developed as an interrelationship between policy continuity and change. On the one hand, the book shows that most of the key powerful actors and networks in the country, established before the introduction of Bologna, retained their prior influence. As a result, Bologna – to a large extent – simply reproduced established relationships and pre-existing higher education policies. The Ministry of Education and Science was the primary actor pushing for this kind of policy continuity. On the other hand, Bologna also partially changed some aspects of the old higher education instruments and the established relations among the actors. These changes took place due to the involvement of civil sector organisations which increasingly became crucial as policy brokers in the process of this reform. The book suggests that the old practices and innovations in Bologna were interacting in layering – a gradual messy and creative build-up of minor innovations by different higher education actors in Ukraine. The accumulation of these innovations led to more fundamental changes – the beginning of the emergence of a more shared higher education policy-making in the previously centrally governed Ukraine. These

findings shed some light on the broader process of Europeanisation in the post-Soviet context. The Ukrainian case thus suggests that at least in the post-Soviet context, Europeanisation is the process in which change and the continuity are not mutually exclusive, but rather closely interconnected.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Abstract

This is the introductory chapter of the book. This chapter explains the background and relevance of the topic of the book – the process of a national higher education reform in the post-Soviet space such as Ukraine until passing the Law about Higher Education in 2014, and the ways in which this story can inform our understanding of some aspects of the Europeanisation in the post-Soviet context. The Bologna reform is, arguably, one of the expressions of Europeanisation in post-Soviet countries that belong to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Bologna Process is an international policy project for the standardisation of higher education structures in the European Higher Education Area. It comprised 29 European countries at the start of the Bologna Process in 1999, and it started incorporating more states later, a lot of which were not part of the EU. Beside the overarching goal to create the EHEA, a number of concrete objectives, called the action lines, were identified, such as the adoption of a common system of credits and cycles of study process, the development of an easily readable diploma supplement issued to graduates, the promotion of student and faculty mobility and the assurance of higher education quality.

This chapter also presents methodological considerations associated with designing the research presented in this book, such as conducting interviews and identifying policy documents – and how thematic analysis was applied to these two types of data. The case of Ukraine is characterised as instrumental because, beside the contribution it makes to how we see the Bologna reform in Ukraine itself, this case study is important for understanding wider Europeanisation issues.

1.1 Introduction

This book explains the process of the Bologna reform in the Ukrainian higher education system, and analyses it as a case of post-Soviet Europeanisation. The Bologna Process (or Bologna) is a European intergovernmental policy initiative to build the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through the development of

compatible and comparable degrees. The book focuses on the period between the start of the reform in Ukraine in 2004 through the pilot project, which turned into a nation-wide reform in 2005 – all the way until 2014. The book also considers higher education developments in the country prior to the start of the Bologna reform – since Ukraine gained its independence in August 1991.

The book demonstrates that there had been a lot of fluidity in the interaction of old practices and relevant policy innovation in Bologna in Ukraine. The interaction between the path dependency and change had primarily been a gradual chaotic, yet creative, and shared build-up of minor innovations by different higher education actors. These innovations in the development of the Bologna instruments may be seen as leading to more substantial transformations over time. This may also serve as a first step towards a reconceptualisation of the Europeanisation process particularly in the post-Soviet context. Bologna in Ukraine can be seen as an illustration of the ways in which Europeanisation may not always necessitate the elimination of past conventions and practices – indeed, in a policy field such as education, abandoning history and tradition would have been a futile endeavour. Policy continuity in the post-Soviet context may be a foundation in the Europeanisation process during which minor innovations are slowly yet continuously being accumulated. This foundation shapes the nature of changes. Therefore, perhaps, the debate regarding a slow pace of Europeanisation in the post-Soviet space might be erroneous, since it carries a hidden assumption – that it is slow in relation to a much faster Europeanisation and resulting transformations in the EU. Such a comparison should be revisited in light of a potential difference in the nature of Europeanisation in the two spaces and the acknowledgement of growing overlaps between the two spaces as well.

1.2 Background and Relevance

Post-Soviet Europeanisation has gained increasing momentum after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Following the past and, at the same time, trying to break away from it, has been a central political contradiction that the newly independent post-Soviet states have been facing. There are 15 countries that comprise the post-Soviet region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Europeanisation is a characteristic feature of transition from the communist past in the post-Soviet space. This is despite the fact that the post-Soviet region includes many countries that do not belong to the European Union (EU) or even Europe as a geographical entity. Europe spreads out much further to the east from the border of the EU, encompassing some countries that do not belong to the EU, such as, for instance, Moldova, Ukraine, and a small western part of Russia (Walters, 2009). Some of these countries are not current, new or applicant states of the EU.

The notion of Europeanisation in the post-Soviet context is a debatable terrain. Zgaga (2009) states that Europeanisation happens mainly in the EU,

whereas the process that characterises non-EU countries should be referred to as 'transition' (p. 176). On the contrary, a group of scholars (Börzel & Pamuk, 2011; Wolczuk, 2009) argue that Europeanisation can take place in countries regardless of their relationship with the EU, as long as they adopt some European values. Such a broad definition of Europeanisation is supported by Wolczuk (2004) too. Additionally, this scholar highlights the need to treat Europeanisation more as an area of inquiry rather than just a concept with a certain meaning.

The Bologna reform is, arguably, one of the expressions of Europeanisation in post-Soviet countries that belong to the EHEA. Bologna began in 1999 when higher education representatives from 29 European countries gathered in the Italian city of Bologna – hence the name, *the Bologna Process*. The participants of the meeting signed the Bologna declaration (1999) in which they proclaimed their intention to build the EHEA by harmonising higher education systems by 2010. The purpose was to facilitate academic and job mobility in the region. In the Bologna declaration (1999), they also called upon other nearby countries to join them in that initiative. Beside the overarching goal to create the EHEA, a number of concrete objectives, called *the action lines* (European Higher Education Area, 2019), were identified, such as the adoption of a common system of credits and cycles of study process, the development of an easily readable diploma supplement issued to graduates, the promotion of student and faculty mobility and the assurance of higher education quality.

Since then, international ministerial conferences have usually been held every two to three years to evaluate progress in the development of the Bologna action lines and to identify next steps (European Higher Education Area, 2019). Although these conferences are referred to as 'ministerial', their participants are not just the ministers of education from the Bologna countries. A number of other stakeholders, such as, for example, the European Commission, have also given their support to the project (Terry, 2010). Besides the ministerial meetings, various workshops, conferences, meetings of international working groups, which contribute to the development of the action lines, have taken place in-between the ministerial conferences. Since its inception, Bologna has expanded the number of its objectives and clarified relevant meanings, as well as attracted new member states and new international stakeholders. Currently, 48 countries, mainly the EU states and a number of its nearby countries, are working to develop the EHEA (European Higher Education Area, 2019).

Vögtle and Martens (2014) claim that the Bologna Process 'presents the largest ongoing reform initiative in higher education' (p. 246). The absence of reference to a geographical area in which this initiative is unfolding suggests that the authors consider Bologna to be the largest higher education initiative worldwide. Indeed, the Bologna Process has created the EHEA that encompasses a vast geographical space (European Higher Education Area, 2019). The EHEA was created in 2010. The plan was to further develop until at least 2020 (Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve communique, 2009). However, post-2020 work has been programmed as well (European Higher Education Area, 2019).

There is a large body of literature about the Bologna Process. Much has been written about the convergence of higher education systems internationally

through the Bologna Process (Delfani, 2013; Fejes, 2006; LažEtić, 2010). Another strand in the literature about the Bologna Process is written from a national perspective, evaluating the degree of the implementation of the action lines in certain countries (e.g. Esyutina, Fearon, & Leatherbarrow, 2013; Portela, Sá, Alexandre, & Cardoso, 2009; Pyykkö, 2008). Considerable attention has also been paid at the international ministerial meetings to the evaluation of the success of the implementation of the Bologna action lines in the participating states, and to the comparison of the results (European Higher Education Area, 2019). However, little attention has been paid to the actual process of a national higher education reform, particularly in the post-Soviet space, and the ways in which it can explain some aspects of the Europeanisation of the post-Soviet context.

1.3 Research Setting

The Ukrainian context was chosen for the following two main reasons. First, Ukraine in many respects is a representative country of the post-Soviet space, which makes a relatively distinct region in the EHEA (Zgaga, 2009). Post-Soviet countries share a common history and geopolitical position in the world, and thus, it is likely that there are some similar mechanisms in the development of the Bologna reforms. Crucially, post-Soviet legacies and, at the same time, the drive for change are manifested quite strongly in Ukraine. This makes Ukraine a good case for studying Europeanisation.

Ukraine, like other post-Soviet countries, obtained its independence fairly recently, in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was based on the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, which put centralisation, controlled productive force, censorship, compulsory patriotism, and isolation from the Western world at the core of the development of the centrally planned economy (Bridge, 2004). All areas of social life, including higher education in the Soviet countries, especially its uniform curricula, reflected the centralised political system. Higher education was used as a platform to 'instil into every student the Marxist-Leninist doctrine which [was] to become his deeply held conviction and guiding principle in life' (Zajda, 1980, p. 98).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, all post-Soviet countries have been transforming 'from an empire to a nation, from a command economy to a market-based one, and from a communist to a democratic system' (Tsygankov, 2007, p. 425, citing Bunce, 1995). However, the legacy of the Soviet influence is apparent in all areas of life in post-Soviet countries, according to Malle (2009). For example, the author states that the central governments in post-Soviet countries tend to ensure the preservation of the centralised top-down control of all policy fields. This is coupled by a persisting censorship of all areas of life and the exercise of political propaganda to ensure that the public agrees with governmental decisions. Malle (2009) further states that policy-making in general lacks transparency. For instance, key jobs and positions throughout post-Soviet countries are taken by people loyal to the government. All of this contributes to a lack of public trust in the state, a communication gap between the state officials and the public, and weak civil

societies (Chudowsky & Kuzio, 2003; Kuzio, 2012). While the practices of the previous regime still persist at the governmental and individual levels, the general political discourse in post-Soviet countries has become more liberal (Fimyar, 2008). This residue of the previous regime in practice tends to be seen in the literature (Levada, 2008) as a barrier for Europeanisation.

Post-Soviet Ukraine is characterised by its strong contextual path-dependency and, at the same time, the drive for change. These tendencies have been obvious from the political events in Ukraine in recent years. At the beginning of independence, the political authorities declared that the development of Ukraine would follow a European direction and that Ukraine would join the EU (Browning & Christou, 2010; Wolczuk, 2009). Ukraine has been cooperating with the EU in different policy areas but it has not yet applied for membership in the EU.

The issues around the European direction of the development of Ukraine have gained momentum in recent international political and media debates. The confrontation between the pro-European and pro-Russian supporters on the territory of Ukraine has been growing for long until it was expressed in the 'Orange revolution' in 2004 and the 'Euromaidan revolution' in 2013–2014. Both revolutions aimed to support the European direction of development in Ukraine. Specifically, the last revolution aimed to achieve closer trade connections between Ukraine and the EU, the overthrow of the pro-Russian political elites in the Ukrainian central bodies of governing, and the membership of Ukraine in the EU. The revolution was followed by the explicit involvement of Russia in the issues in Ukraine. The Crimea peninsula was annexed by Russia almost right before the war with Russia started in the east of Ukraine. So Ukraine is a case where the clash between the two big powers – the EU and Russia – is very strong. Other post-Soviet countries have not faced this many crises of such a wide scope. This might be a legitimate reason to see Ukraine as a somewhat extreme case of post-Soviet Europeanisation.

The selection of Ukraine as a case for this research was based not only on the fact that it is a post-Soviet country with a very strongly expressed tendency for adhering to the past conventions and a strong drive for change. Ukraine was selected as a case also because of my familiarity with the context. Understanding the context under study by a researcher is extremely important (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Direct exposure to life in Ukraine for a number of years allowed me to familiarise myself closely with the general political landscape of the country, as well as with the specifics of its higher education. Moreover, personal experience of undergraduate higher education in Ukraine right after the introduction of Bologna has been an asset in this research. It gave me valuable background information about Bologna. I witnessed the uncertainty and struggle of both instructors and students in putting Bologna into practice. The beginning of the reform was a popular topic for informal discussions. Such discussions were often associated with criticism because of the uncertainty about how to work according to Bologna, and the resulting consequences that students had to suffer. For instance, instructors were unsure how to count course credits and grade points in the new 100-point grading scale, and were more inclined to grade lower. Students also had problems with grade transfer and, moreover, the recognition of their studies, which were undertaken abroad, in

Ukraine. This knowledge and experience prompted me to choose Ukraine as a case for the research presented in this book. Life experience in Ukraine for around a couple of decades became a basis for my awareness of the historical, political and higher educational contexts of the country. Moreover, I was born and raised in western part of Ukraine. This region is commonly seen in Ukraine as a cradle of pro-European views, as also recognised in the literature (Janmaat, 2008). My western Ukrainian origin was perhaps a factor that sparked the interest in wider Europeanisation issues in the country, too.

1.4 Methodological Considerations

This book presents the results of a qualitative study by providing exemplary quotations from 43 semi-structured interviews with higher education actors (including representatives from the central governing bodies, different types of organizations, academic staff members at universities – see Appendix 1), and considering 88 policy documents (Appendix 2). I intended to focus on the documents that were produced mainly by the types of actors I focused on when recruiting interviewees. First, I looked for Bologna related policy documents at higher education institutions. Only seven Bologna documents at two universities (A and B), where interviews took place, were collected. Besides the policy texts from the universities, two types of Ukrainian state documents were collected. One of them comprises four Ukrainian Bologna implementation reports that were found on the EHEA website (European Higher Education Area, 2019). The other type includes 62 legislative and executive documents found on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Supreme Council website, and through a few other online and hard copy sources. In particular, the following documents were collected: resolutions and regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, which is the Ukrainian Government; decrees and letters of the Ministry of Education and Science; a joint decree of this Ministry and the Ministry of Social Policy; several laws related to higher education; drafts of the most recent law regarding higher education and its adopted version (Law about Higher Education, 2014); and one presidential order. Finally, in addition to the university and national documents, some documents issued by the key civil sector organisations in Ukraine were collected, as well all international Bologna declarations and communiques (nine) up to 2012 and a few other international documents were collected from the EHEA website (European Higher Education Area, 2019).

Most of the data used in this study were collected between November-December, 2013, except for the Law about Higher Education (2014) which was collected a year later. These data pertain to the time span that encompasses higher education developments in Ukraine right after its independence in August 1991 up until the issue of the new Law regarding higher education in April 2014. The developments after the beginning of the Bologna pilot project in Ukraine in 2004 were looked at in more detail.

Conducting the empirical research that this book is based on was generally a positive experience despite the challenges I faced and anxieties they triggered. The

beginning of October 2013 was a fortunate time to start field work. It enabled me to conduct most of the planned interviews by the end of November – the point at which the country broke into mass protests and strikes that led to a revolution. Many people disagreed with the decision of the-then president and his team in the central governing bodies not to establish the Free Trade Association with the European Union (EU). The protests throughout the country grew stronger after the violence of the police against protesters who stayed overnight at the main square in the capital. The protesters then started demanding the impeachment of the President and the dismissal of the Government, because they assumed that these authorities managed the violence on the main square that night and afterwards. This situation complicated the process of organising the last interviews.

When instability in Ukraine began to escalate, just a few members of higher education institutions and representatives from civil organisations were still to be interviewed. While no significant problems arose with the civil sector representatives, it was particularly difficult to find someone willing to be interviewed at the university. The anxiety about confidentiality, which existed before the political instability broke out, intensified afterwards. As mentioned earlier, the main issue that led to the turmoil was the choice of the-then political majority not to sign the Free Trade Association with the EU. This Association, if signed, was generally recognised to be the most significant step towards Ukraine eventually joining the EU. Apparently, the prospect of discussing Bologna, which is a European issue, was met by the institutional members with caution in that situation. The Bologna Process had been developing in the country for a long time, including the period dominated by the political majority that refused to sign the Free Trade Association. However, representatives of the institutions apparently became cautious to voice opinions on any European issues, given the persecution and imprisonment of street protestors who supported the Free Trade Association. However, eventually the last two representatives of higher education institutions were recruited. Interestingly, these individuals were not just instructors – they were also holding the posts of academic managers. They noted that they were fine discussing the Bologna Process because it was not about choosing between the EU and Russia in wider international relations, since Russia was also in Bologna. Such a choice, however, was inherent in the case of the Free Trade Association. Signing this Association presupposed that Ukraine would turn away from a tight trade cooperation with Russia, which has existed since Soviet times.

I managed to finish conducting interviews within the first few days of the growing instability in the country. Data collection was finished before the street demonstrations grew into a country-wide revolution. The revolution further brought a change of Government, as the President fled the country; the southern-eastern region of Ukraine – the Crimea – was annexed by Russia; the change of Parliament took place; and a war started in eastern Ukraine.

The change of the main authorities in all central governing bodies was followed by passing the new Law regarding Higher Education in April 2014. Despite the fact that I had finished data collection before the Law was issued, I made the decision to include the Law in the analysis because it was one of the most important milestones in the Bologna reform in Ukraine.

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