

## Turkish Higher Education Institutions in Bologna Process

*Ö. Öule Erçet*

Department of Educational Administration, Inspection,  
Planning and Economics, Hacettepe University, Turkey

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**Abstract:** In this paper, within the framework of setting up the European Higher Education Area, the policies and changes that have been adopted and that are to be adapted by 2010 in the Turkish higher education system are outlined and examined. Turkish Higher Education, with its current structure and functioning, has long been one of the most controversial issues discussed by the public. It is hard to say that these discussions go on in scientific platforms and thus contributing to the development of the higher education system as required by the contemporary dynamics of the world. This paper contributes to continuing the discussions concerning the Bologna process in an academic setting systematically and the self-evaluation of Turkish Higher Education System in the European Higher Education Area and making the improvements required.

**Key words:** Bologna process % higher education % European higher education area % Turkish higher education

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the rapid developments in information and communication technologies, the diversified need for lifelong learning, globalization and global problems have had a deep impact on education and educational institutions. It is with regret to say that education, with its current philosophy and content and educational organizations almost at all levels, are unable to adjust in terms of structure and operation to the above mentioned changes, which require education and educational organizations to be revisited and adapted in terms of aims, structure and processes with reference to the new paradigms that involve variety, timeliness and uncertainty in today's complicated world. These changes require organizations that are simple and clear enough to meet complexity, flexible and prepared-for-transformation enough to meet the contemporary challenges, creative and sharing enough for transforming plurality into enrichment, pioneering enough to eradicate uncertainty. In this sense, the most intense and fastest reform-making process of all times has been going on in the world of education almost all over the world. Undoubtedly, higher education institutions are in the focal position in the reformation efforts and related discussions, as suggested by the function that they are expected to undertake. Turkish Higher Education due to Turkey's nominee status has gained the right to participate in the Bologna process and officially joined the process in 2001 in Prague. In this paper, within the framework of setting up the European Higher Education Area, the policies and changes that have been adopted and that are to be adapted by 2010 in the Turkish higher education system are outlined and examined.

### HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE NEW CENTURY

The higher education institutions described as the ivory tower of the elite in the twentieth century have had to face since the 1970s a growing educational demand by the masses. This may be considered as one of the most important

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**Corresponding Author:** Dr. Ö. Öule Erçet, Department of Educational Administration, Inspection, Planning and Economics, Hacettepe University, Turkey

socio-economic, political and economic consequences of globalization. Within this process, the higher education institutions have had to start a multi-dimensional transformation endeavor so as to meet the fresh requirements caused by

- C information explosion
- C global markets and economies
- C international competition and cooperation
- C scarce resources
- C environmental sustainability
- C cognitive revolution
- C demographic mobility and diversifying labor force
- C arbitrary attacks and the creation of new defense systems.

Such a change requires educational organizations to transform into institutions that generate knowledge, that are able to transfer knowledge to wider circles, that are able to collate and apply knowledge and that are able to create the intellectual capital to achieve this [1-4]. In this sense, it can comfortably be stated that the higher education institutions are now face to face the challenges or the opportunities more than the other educational organizations.

#### **THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA**

The first projections of these developments in Europe can be seen in Magna Carta, signed by 430 university rectors at a meeting to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna in 1988.

The main points emphasized in Magna Carta are that at the approaching end of this millennium the future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific and technological development and that this is built up in centers of culture, knowledge and research as represented by universities, that the universities' task of spreading knowledge among the younger generations implies that, in today's world, they must also serve society as a whole and that the cultural, social and economic future of society requires, in particular, a considerable investment in continuing education and that the cooperation between and among the European universities should be encouraged with loyalty to the values of European higher education tradition [5].

10 years after Magna Carta, Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system was signed by the four Ministers of Education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom on May 25 1998, when it was the 800th anniversary of Sorbonne University. Due to the harmonization content of this declaration, it received reactions from the other EU member states, leading to serious disputes. The disputes were resolved by the joint declaration by the 29 European Ministers of Education in Bologna in 1999. With this declaration, the Bologna Process started to adapt to the economic, commercial and financial markets and to realize the European Higher Education Area to support this structure by 2010.

#### **BOLOGNA PROCESS**

It has been stipulated in the Bologna Process that a series of reforms are needed to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and to make sure that the European Higher Education Area becomes a reality by 2010 [6].

To this end, the following targets have been adopted:

- C Enhancement of the capacity of European Higher Education to compete at an international level.
- C Establishment of a European Higher Education Area and development of European Higher Education worldwide.

- C Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens' employability and the international competitiveness of the European Higher Education System
- C Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labor market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.
- C Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility.
- C Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement for students, researchers, academicians and administrative staff.
- C Establishment of European quality assurance in higher education with an emphasis to the European dimension.

Moreover, in the Bologna Declaration, it was decided that the ministers come together every two years, that the first meeting be held in Prag, the third meeting in Berlin in 2003 and the fourth meeting in Bergen in 2005 [7].

In March 2000, in the Lisbon Summit, the objective that EU would be the most dynamic and the most competitive economic region based on science by 2010 was adopted. This objective was also emphasized repeatedly in the summits in Stockholm 2001, in Barcelona 2002. The means to achieve this objective were determined to be the economic reforms and changes in the realm of education and instruction. In the meeting in Barcelona, it was decided that the European Higher Education Area, upon which the ministers of education had agreed in Bologna, would be improved.

In the meeting in Prag in 2001, it was decided to "enhance the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area at a global level, accomplish mobility among the countries participating in the Bologna process, promote the quality of education, life-long learning and cooperation between higher education institutions and students." In the summit in Berlin in 2003, the new objectives and priorities following the Bologna process were set. Particularly, the middle term priorities were set as quality assurance, education based on two cycles and recognition of degrees. These were further explicated as the establishment of quality assurance framework by 2005, the establishment of a common structure for graduate degrees, setting up degrees that are comparable and compatible and clarifying workload, position and program outputs.

In the Bergen Summit in 2005, the reports concerning the developments, principles, standards and practices, qualifications that are comparable and compatible, processes and trends and the assessments in terms of students since Berlin were considered. Regarding these points, it can be stated that the scorecards by the follow-up group formed in Prag declaration in 2001 are of great significance. In the declaration, the following were emphasized:

- C The main guidelines, aims and objectives defined in the Bologna process are shared,
- C Policies within each country should be directed toward the Bologna process to establish the European Higher Education Area,
- C That the newly-joined countries will be assisted is assured.

In the achievement of these objectives, it is essential that the diversity among the universities should not be eradicated and that national differences in education should be respected. Further, it is indicated that universities and other stakeholders of the process find national and international partnerships positive, that structural changes in the curriculums will be productive, that it requires time to understand and promote the innovative process that Europe needs [8].

#### **TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL REVIEW**

In the section titled "The History of Turkish Higher Education" of the report titled "The Current State of Turkish Higher Education" by the Council of Higher Education, it is stated that the previous higher education institutions in Turkey have been replaced by current higher education institutions, the form of which has been taken from the western system [9].

As the first examples of the western-type higher education institutions, the Imperial Naval Engineering College (*Mühendishane-i Bahri-i Hümayun*) established in 1773, the Imperial Military Engineering College (*Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayun*) in 1795, the Imperial Medical College (*Tıbbiye*) in 1827 and the Imperial Military College (*Harbiye*) can be listed. In the same report, it is emphasized that the start of modern university dates back to the establishment of Istanbul University, which replaced the former “Darülfünun (House of Sciences),” after the declaration of the republic by Atatürk, the founder and President of the Republic, in 1923. In 1931, the government invited Professor Albert Malche of the University of Geneva to prepare a report on Turkish university reform. Atatürk read the report himself and jotted down his own thoughts on university reform in the margins of the pages of the report. Following this report, the Grand National Assembly replaced the Darülfünun with Istanbul University in 1933. It is also indicated in the report that the demand for higher education rapidly increased since the 1960s with the increase in the population of the youth and the period between 1973 and 1981 is known to be the time when universities became widespread in Anatolia. Moreover, it is reported that in the year 1981 in the 166 higher education institutions of 5 types (universities, academies, vocational colleges, conservatories and distance education institution “YAYKUR”), there were 20.816 teaching staff and 237.369 students receiving education.

1981 was a turning point in Turkish Higher Education in that in this year all the higher education institutions were grouped under the governance of one body, Council of Higher Education. The academies were changed into universities, institutes of education into faculties of education, conservatories and vocational colleges became part of universities. The functions of YAYKUR passed on to Anadolu University within the framework of Open University so as to promote distance education. In addition, non-governmental organizations were provided with the opportunity to set up non-profit higher education institutions.

It is stated in the draft report titled “The Strategy for Turkish Higher Education” by the Council of Higher Education in June 2006 that 1992 was another turning point in the Turkish Higher Education System in that in this year the number of universities in Turkey increased. It was in 1992 that 21 new state universities, 2 high technology institutes and second private university were established. Moreover, it is indicated that the total number of universities and high technology institutes reached 56 by 1994 [10].

## **THE CURRENT SITUATION**

**The size of the Higher Education System:** According to the draft report titled “The Strategy for Turkish Higher Education” by the Council of Higher Education in June 2006, the number of universities is 93, 68 of them being state universities and 25 being private universities. In the 68 state universities, there are 549 faculties, 259 institutes, 236 colleges, 599 vocational colleges. In the 25 private universities, there are 131 faculties, 71 institutes, 30 colleges, 28 vocational colleges.

According to the statistics regarding higher education in the school year 2005-2006 released by the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM), the total number of students currently enrolled in undergraduate programs, including distance education programs, is 2.201.217. The number of students enrolled in formal undergraduate education institutions is 1.356.117, in open university 829.053, in the other higher education institutions (Gülhane Military School of Medicine and Military Schools) 16.047. The number of students enrolled in masters programs in the school year 2005-2006 is 111.814, in doctoral programs 32.503, in residency 10.431. In the private higher education institutions, the number of students enrolled in masters programs in the school year 2005-2006 is 275, in doctoral programs 72, in residency 6586. In the school year 2005-2006, the number of professors is 11.841, that of associate professors is 5769, that of assistant professors is 15.129, that of lecturers is 14.353, that of instructors is 6302, that of experts is 2595, that of research assistants is 25751, that of interpreters is 21, that of experts in educational planning and curriculum development is 24. 32.858 of the total 84.785 academic staff are female [11].

**Administration of Higher Education:** As mentioned above, 1981 was a turning point in Turkish higher education in that in this year all the higher education institutions were grouped under the governance of one body, the Council of Higher

Education. Universities, faculties, institutes and four-year schools are founded by law, while two-year vocational schools, departments and divisions are established by the Council of Higher Education. Likewise, the opening of a degree program at any level is subject to ratification by the Council. The Council of Higher Education is the only corporate public body responsible for the planning, coordination and supervision of higher education within the provisions set forth in the Higher Education Law numbered 2547. The top administrative bodies of the Turkish Higher Education System are the Council of Higher Education and the Interuniversity Council, which is an academic advisory body, comprising the rectors of all universities and one member elected by the senate of each university. The supervision of the universities is carried out by a separate council. Figure 1 illustrates the current organizational scheme of Turkish Higher Education System.

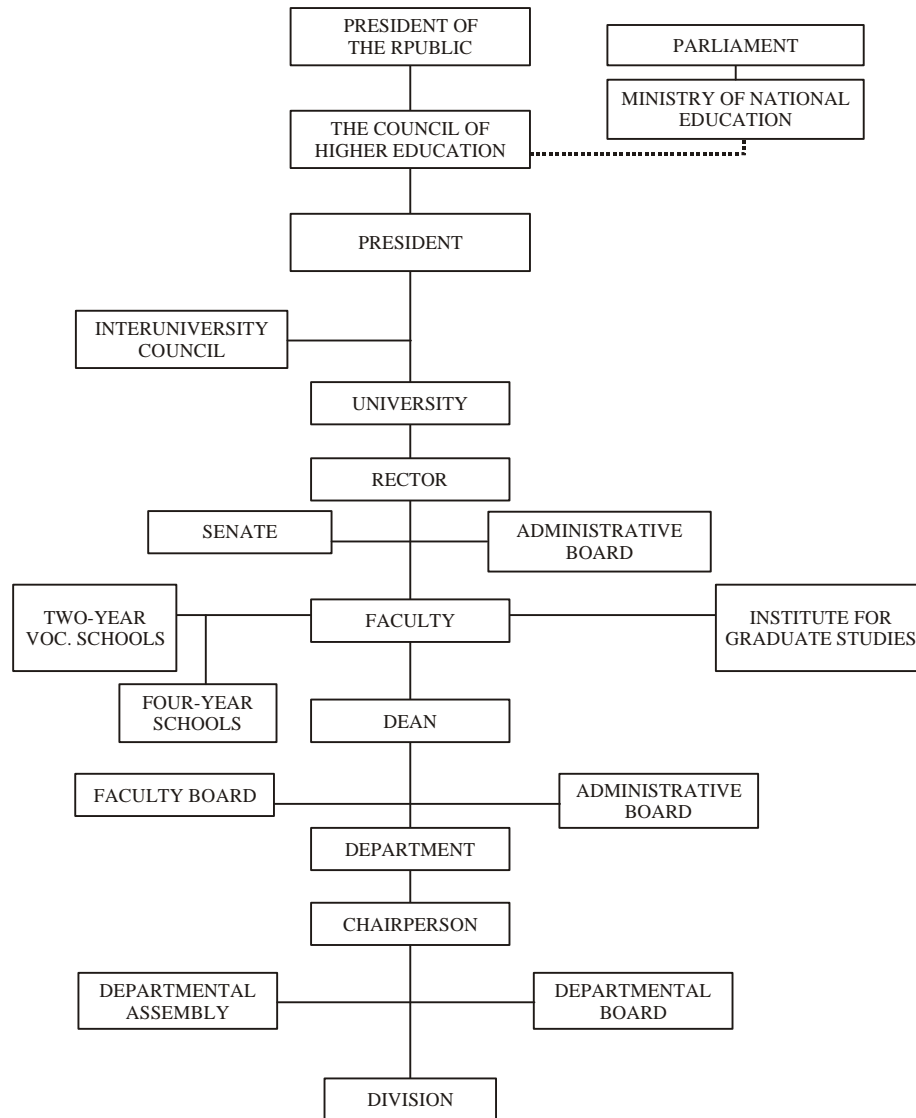


Figure 1: Organizational Chart Of The Turkish Higher Education System

Source: <http://www.yok.gov.tr/webeng/figure1.doc>

It is a requisite that higher education institutions be established according to this chart. The official rules and regulations concerning the structure and functioning of universities and higher education institutions are stated in Law numbered 2547 [12].

Private universities have only to conform to the basic academic requirements and structures set forth in the law. Apart from this, they are completely free to manage their own affairs according to rules and regulations adopted by their boards of trustees, in which lay members in most cases make up the majority. In state universities, six candidates from among full professors of that or any other university are elected by the assembly of faculty members, which includes all full, associate and assistant professors in that university. From among these six, the Council of Higher Education elects three nominees by secret ballot and submits their names to the President of the Republic, who appoints one of them as the rector for a period of four years, renewable only once [10].

### **FINANCING OF TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION**

In the draft report titled “The Strategy for Turkish Higher Education,” the finance of Turkish Higher Education is considered within the framework of public service, as indicated in the Article 130 of the Constitution. It is stated that both state and private universities are established by law and that they provide a public service under the supervision of public bodies in terms of their administration and finance. Moreover, it is stressed that being considered in the same category in terms of the service they provide, state and private universities are financed through two different modes of finance, being public finance in state universities and private finance in private universities. In addition, it is reported that state universities are allocated a certain amount of budget, that the budget systems have been changed three times in the last 35 years and have been criticized due to their over-centralist structure. With the change in the law in 2003, starting from 2006 the Budget System based on Strategic Plans are to be applied in all the public organizations, including universities, which implies that there will be difficulties in the process of transition to this new practice. The private universities operate on private finance. However, with the additional Article 18 of the Law numbered 2547, they are given the right to use public finance, limited to the expenses in their budgets. Another controversial point emphasized in the report is that private universities are provided with the opportunities that may be considered as financial benefits.

According to the budget report in 2006, the budget allocated for National Ministry of Education is 16.568.145.50 YTL, the budget for the Council of Higher Education is 5.846.822.2 YTL, total budget allocated for education is 22.414.968.20 YTL. The share of the budget for education in the general budget is 12.8% and the one in GDP 4.15%. In the last decade, its share in the general budget has ranged from 9.2% to 12.9% and in the GDP from 2.37% to 4.18% [13].

It is rather hard to say that the resources allocated for higher education is sufficient as Turkey ranks last among the OECD countries almost every year [14].

### **TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION AND BOLOGNA PROCESS**

The relations between Turkey and EU started with Turkey’s application associate membership in the European Economic Community in 1959. Following the approval of the application by EEC, an Association Agreement known as the Ankara Agreement was signed on September 12 1963. The Agreement stipulated 3 stages: preparatory (3 years), transition (two periods being 12 and 22 years from 1973) and the final period. At the end of the transition period, it was planned to integrate Turkey into a customs union with the EEC. A timetable for the abolition of tariffs and quotas on goods traded between Turkey and the EEC was established with a further protocol in November 1970. According to the protocol, Turkey would adjust its laws concerning agriculture and economy. Furthermore, the Additional Protocol envisaged the free circulation of natural persons between the Parties in the next 12 to 22 years.

However, Turkey was not able to fulfill its responsibilities in the transition period and discounts in customs came to halt. There occurred a temporary freeze in relations in 1980. Turkey applied for full membership in 1987 and the answer

was that the Customs Union should be completed in 1995 as envisaged. The negotiations for customs union restarted in 1993 and after the two-year talks, the agreement for customs union entered into force on January 1, 1996. The recognition of Turkey as a candidate country for accession at the Helsinki European Council of December 1999, opened a new era in Turkey-EU relations. In line with the Helsinki European Council Conclusions, the European Commission prepared an Accession Partnership for Turkey, which was announced on November 8, 2000 and was formally approved by the Council of the EU on February 26, 2001 [15]. Turkey, due to its nominee country status, gained the right to participate in the Bologna process and in 2001 officially joined the Bologna process in Prag.

The follow-up group formed according to the Prag declaration made an evaluation in Bergen in 2005 of Turkish higher education about the priorities of the Bologna process (Table 1).

Table 1: The Bologna Scorecard of Turkey

Quality assurance	Some progress has been made
1. Stage of development of quality assurance system	Some progress has been made
2. Key elements of evaluation systems	Some progress has been made
3. Level of participation of students	Some progress has been made
4. Level of international participation, co-operation and networking	Some progress has been made
Two-cycle degree system	Excellent performance
5. Stage of implementation of two-cycle system	Excellent performance
6. Level of student enrolment in two-cycle system	Excellent performance
7. Access from first cycle to second cycle	Very good performance
Recognition of degrees and periods of Study	Very good performance
Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement	Very good performance
Ratification of Lisbon Recognition Convention	Good performance
Stage of implementation of ECTS	Very good performance
Total	Good performance

Source: Bologna Process Stocktaking Report from a Working Group Appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group, Bergen, May 2005

As indicated in the draft report titled “The Strategy for Turkish Higher Education,” Turkey is in a good position, barring the quality assurance. Seeing the higher education reform in Turkey through foreign eyes, Thomson describes the practices and the process as “a bumpy journey-but worth it: Bon Voyage” [16]. In the report that the Council of Higher Education has put forward for discussion as a preparation for the process, the practices carried out and to be applied within the scope of the Bologna process are listed as:

- C The activities concerning the ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementations in Turkey have been carried out by the universities under the supervision of the Council of Higher Education and have become an obligatory practice in all the higher education institutions in the school year 2005-2006.
- C According to the regulation of “National Student Representatives,” coming to life on September 25, 2005, the Chairperson of the Turkish National Student Representatives and the related bodies have started to work.
- C Within the frame of the establishment of the quality assessment and development in higher education institutions at the European level, the regulation prepared by the Council of Higher Education titled “The Regulation for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education” came into force on September 20, 2005. The regulation covers the evaluation of the administrative practices and the educational, instructional and research activities in the higher education institutions, their quality improvement practices, general principles concerning endorsement and recognition of their quality levels through independent external evaluation process and the responsibilities of the Council of Higher Education and higher education institutions. According to this regulation, the Commission for

Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education was set up. The commission represents the final stage in the activities aiming to found the quality assurance structure at the national level. It is envisaged that from 2006 the higher education institutions will complete their internal assessment activities and present the first results in the school year 2006-2007 and that Turkey will have fulfilled all the responsibilities concerning the related action when it attends the Bologna process ministers of education meeting in London in 2007.

- C It has been planned that the activities regarding the framework of higher education competencies will have been completed by the end of 2007.
- C The Lisbon convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region signed by Turkey on December 1st, 2004 was ratified on February 2nd, 2006 and entered into force on February 28, 2006. The Board of the Council of Higher Education agreed on the regulation concerning the procedure to refer to during the applications for accreditation with reference to the "Guidelines for Diploma Assessment" of the convention. It is envisaged that the new regulation will be in practice in 2006 [10].

Along with these activities of the Council of Higher Education, in the 9th growth plan for 2007-2013, dated July 1st, 2006, it is stated that within the framework of the Bologna process such important activities as student and academic staff mobility actions, ECTS and diploma supplement have been carried out; however, the fact that the centralist structure of the higher education system and the problems regarding quality have had a negative impact on the competitiveness and its capacity to meet the needs of the society remains to be solved. Moreover, in the plan

- C The reconstruction of the Council of Higher Education in such a way that it becomes responsible for standard-setting, coordination and planning,
- C Supporting higher education institutions to have a competitive structure and financial autonomy in line with transparency and reporting,
- C Helping universities to focus on the educational, research and service activities directed toward local specialization areas in cooperation with society and business world,
- C The establishment of the sectoral organized industry zones to support the production based on local specialization and university-industry cooperation in proper regions
- C The improvement and diversification of the financial resources of the higher education institutions are all envisaged.

## **DISCUSSION**

As indicated in the Report for the Implementation of the Bologna Process in Turkey 2004-2005, it is hard to say that Turkey is competing on equal terms with many other European countries. For instance, the higher education institutions have to deal with the inadequacy of the financial resources as well as the bureaucratic pathologies caused by the financial system, which brings about a situation in which while the expectations are high, the financial support to facilitate these expectations is low. Another example is that while private universities can enjoy administrative and financial autonomy, while state universities cannot. However, the countries in Western Europe already have these and ask for more. Considering how important it is for the higher education institutions to be financially and administratively autonomous especially in terms of competitiveness, it is obvious that state universities are badly in need of the equal state of affairs [17].

Another point to remember is that the awareness of the Bologna process in Turkish Higher Education is not sufficiently mature and common. This comes to mean that universities are still not able to use the opportunities created as a result of the active participation in the Bologna process. As a matter of fact, this point is emphasized in the report. Agreeing with this, Gümrukçü states that the solution to the problems as to the process depends on increasing the awareness [18].



Another important point to note is that whether the Turkish Higher Education institutions will be able to benefit from the actions in the multidimensional educational programs like Erasmus, Socrates, Leonardo Da Vinci and Youth Programs and to receive the necessary financial support in the process of the establishment of the European Higher Education Area by 2010.

As a result of the completion of the preparations by the Turkish National Agency in 2002, in the school year 2003-2004, the participation of Turkey in these programs was made possible through a pilot project including 15 universities. These programs provided the financial support necessary for the promotion of the Bologna process within the country. It is planned that Turkey will have sent 40.000 students by 2010. It is considered to be important to benefit to a great extent from these programs, based on the investment in manpower by the member states [19, 20].

Turkish Higher Education, with its current structure and functioning, has long been one of the most controversial issues discussed by the public. It is hard to say that these discussions go on in scientific platforms and thus contributing to the development of the higher education system as required by the contemporary dynamics of the world. This paper contributes to continuing the discussions concerning the Bologna process in an academic setting systematically and the self-evaluation of Turkish Higher Education System in the European Higher Education Area and making the improvements required. It can be stated that Turkish Higher Education System has the internal capability to cope with the challenges imposed by the new century. It seems that the transformation of the system's capability into leadership processes not only in the European Higher Education Area but also on a world scale depends largely on the provision of the financial support and the enforcement of the regulations concerning administrative and financial autonomy. Still, these questions need urgent answers: What is the place of the Turkish higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area? To what extent will they be able to carry their internal capability up to the point where they could undertake the role of leadership?

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