



The impact of the Bologna Process on the governance of higher education systems in Eastern Partnership countries

Nicolae Toderas, Ph.D. and **Ana-Maria Stăvaru**, Ph.D.

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania



Purpose and main questions

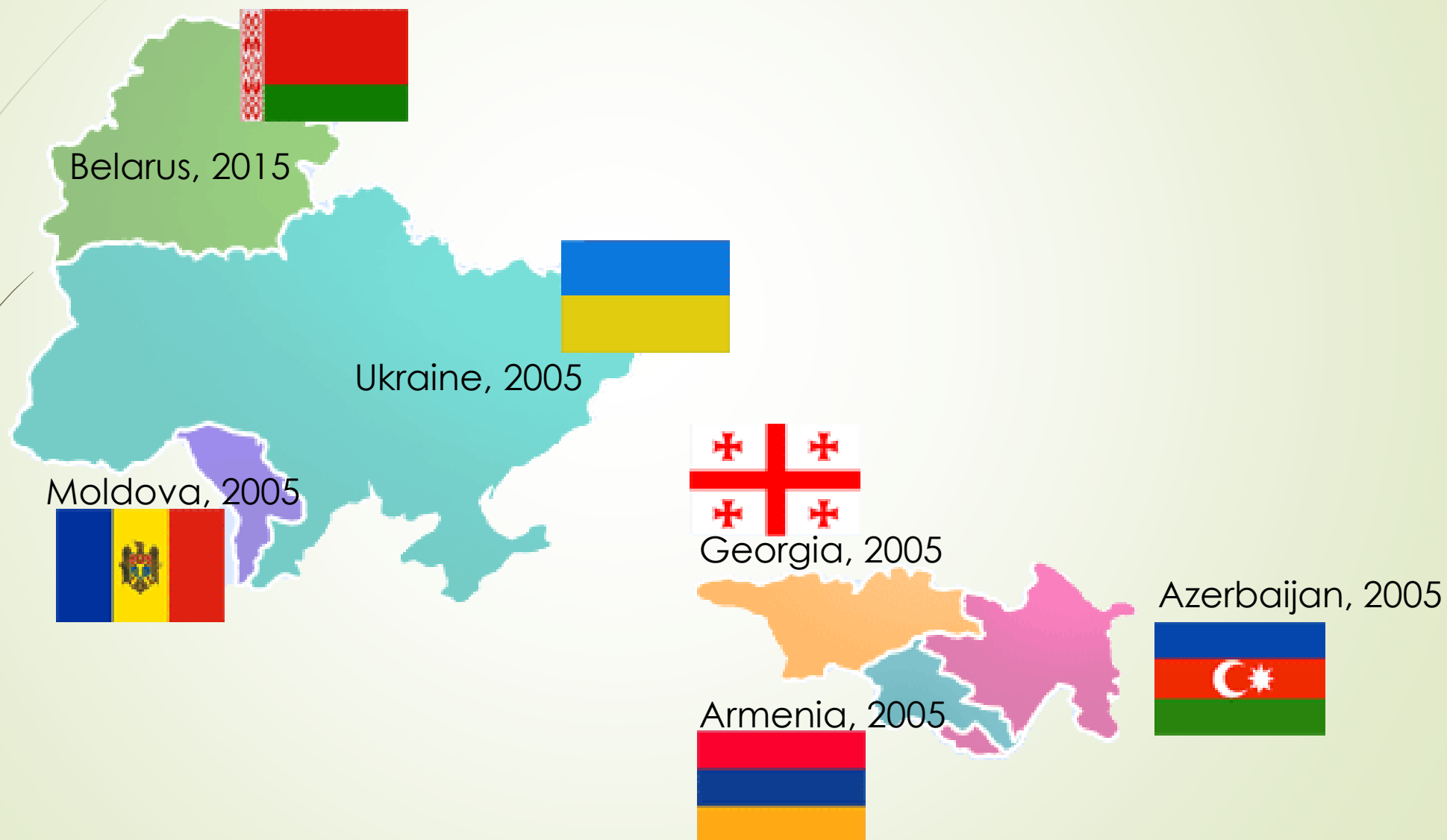
- The paper offers an overall view on the tendencies of change in HE in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries in connection with the Bologna Process(BP).
- Regarding the impact of the BP in terms of structural changes in the governance of higher education systems two research questions are discussed:
 - How did the processes of systemic change occur and how ample were they?
 - How can EaP countries be empowered from the perspective of the *normative power* of EHEA in order to make the processes of consolidating the governance of higher education systems irreversible?



What is the Eastern Partnership?

- EaP is a platform for multilateral cooperation between the EU and the six countries in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), in order to avoid the isolation of the region.
- Based on differentiation and inclusivity principles (Korosteleva 2017; Sakwa 2017), the EaP meant to diminish the barriers generated by the enlargement of the EU and the deepening of European integration.
- Through the EaP, the EU nurtured a partnership relationship based on normative pressure. It can be seen as a merit-based approach focusing on applying the “*more for more*” principle.

Bologna Process accession of EaP countries





The context of cooperation

- The political motivation for becoming a BP member and participating in the development of EHEA - with the exception of Belarus, consisted in getting closer to the EU and maximising the benefits offered within the framework of cooperation.
- The enlargement of the BP towards countries in Eastern Europe has generated and supported a series of structural changes in the governance of their HES.
- Cooperation through BP and other instruments is the catalyst for intensifying other policies for intergovernmental cooperation (Martens and Wolf 2009).
- The EU's Action Plans with some countries from the EaP area have made reference to cooperation and adjustment of higher education systems in line with EU approaches and the BP principles.



Initial state of art of HES from EaP countries

Up until to effectively becoming part of the BP, HES of the EaP countries had the following characteristics:

- they developed and expanded mainly in the soviet period, without having a tradition regarding institutional autonomy and academic freedom;
- the governance arrangements were specific to the state-control paradigm of management;
- they were powerfully controlled by the government, through the shared coordination of several line ministries - the HEIs benefited from variable institutional autonomy depending on the their type and regime;
- regulation was done based on arbitrary decisions, which were not founded on evidence and were non-deliberative;
- the creation of parallel sets of informal arrangements had the role of eluding current regulations regarding the monitoring of quality assurance, the financing of HEIs, the creation of public or private HEIs etc., which generated an uncontrolled expansion.



Three distinct patterns of change of governance arrangements

- By their aspirations of European integration, the EaP countries can be divided into three categories:
 - countries which manifest their interest of joining the EU in the near of medium-term future (Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia);
 - countries that wish to intensify their commercial relations and political dialogue with the EU, and thus diversify and maximize the advantages and facilities offered by the EU's internal market (Armenia and Azerbaijan);
 - countries that want to diminishing political tensions with certain Western European countries and with the EU (Belarus).



The pathway of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

- Their motivation was initially found in the political desire of getting closer to the EU.
- There was a desire to dismantle the institutional arrangements inherited from the soviet period (especially for Georgia).
- There is an incremental style of dismantling the old state-control arrangements of governance and replacing them with others such as state, socio or market governance.
- The amplitude of the changes was diminished by delays in the elaboration and adoption of new education laws.
- In result, there was a gradual transition from elitist, profoundly bureaucratic, politicized systems that were based on state-control arrangements towards systems which were much more open, collegial, and less politicized (Dobbins and Kwiek 2017, Tofan and Bischof 2017).



The pathway of Armenia and Azerbaijan

- The motivating factors for becoming part of the BP were oriented towards diversifying opportunities and facilities in education and research.
- In the case of Armenia higher education was considered a proxy for the political objective of developing a deep relation with EU, which was declared a key direction for the country's foreign policy (Matei, Iwinska and Geven 2013).
- Reforms in the governance of HES were oriented more towards aspects such as increasing the quality of HE, developing qualifications systems and intensifying different types of mobility.
- HES has remained excessively regulated and controlled, powerfully centralized and dependent on political decisions.

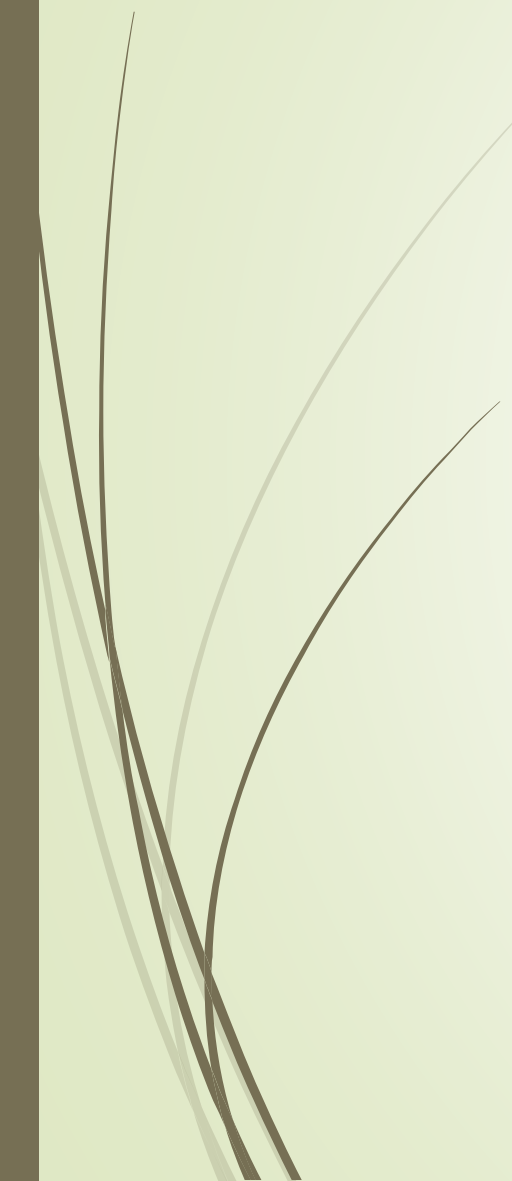


The pathway of Belarus

- Belarus is the first country for which ex-post conditionalities were imposed in order to become a member of BP. They refer to the implementation of the fundamental values of EHEA, under a careful process of monitoring by the BFUG.
- The accession to EHEA was based on a limited implementation of BP provisions.
- Reforms in the field of HE in Belarus have especially targeted the attraction of foreign students and capitalizing on research results (Polglase 2013; Gille-Belova 2015).
- Even if few actions were initiated, the governance regime has remained state-oriented, with authoritarian accents.



An overview of the of the obtained results

- There is a predominance of forms of governance in which old arrangements are overlapped with new ones, which are much closer to the market and society. The state continues to play a major role.
 - There is still confusion in the region regarding functions of the new arrangements.
 - Non-linear and anachronic forms of implementing reforms have predominated.
 - There is a prevalence of incremental changes, except for certain contexts of abrupt change in the case of Georgia or non-change in the case of Belarus during 2005 - 2011.
 - The amplitude of change is limited.
- 



Causes of the latent institutionalization of the new governance arrangements of HES

- The BP has represented an opportunity for ideological battle between maintaining the old arrangements for system governance and changing them in the sense of becoming closer to Western European models.
- The persistence of a non-deliberative framework of policy-making.
- The activity of pressure groups was supported through top-down mechanisms.
- The region is characterised by a limited capacity for reflection and internal deliberation regarding the opportunity and way of changing the relationship between state and HE institutions.



Conclusions



- In the EaP countries there is no single pattern of change. The institutionalization of new governance arrangements was made based on intermittent processes.
- The general impact of enlargement of the BP towards the East is a positive one, however, and the governance of national HE systems has changed significantly in comparison to the period before accession.
- The amplitude of the changes largely depended of the political context of each EaP country and the incentives offered by the EU or international donors.
- There is a need to place more accent in the following period on monitoring and qualitative evaluation of the processes of changing the governance regimes of HES in this area based on a set of common results indicators.