



Internationalization of Education: From Bologna Process to Orhun Exchange Programme

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to introduce the Orhun Exchange Programme implemented by the Turkic Universities Union, and seeks to position it within the broader, historical developments, and it states that the recent trend of internationalization of education is beneficial for the renaissance of the Turkic civilization. In Middle Ages, mobility of students and scholars helped to the formation of the Islamic Golden Age, rise of Turkic civilization on the Silk Road, and then the renaissance and enlightenment in Europe. Recently, the shift of economic and scientific gravity from the West to the East presents new potentials for the Turkic world to turn it into a hub in the increasingly interconnecting world. The Orhun Exchange Programme is a bold step to enable universities of Turkic countries to cooperate in their fields of superiority for a joint development.

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1. Introduction

In 2017, Turkic Council Turkic Universities Union initiated a new exchange programme for students and academics of its member universities. For the academic year 2017-2018, 22 students and 1 academic from 6 universities in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey benefited from the Orhun Exchange Programme.

In the concluding decades of the 20th century, education entered into a new period of internationalization with the rising globalization. The mobility of students gained importance to raise flexible graduates, who can benefit from the advantages of the globalizing market conditions. It is known that mobility was also seen in Eurasia in Middle Ages. Islamic and Turkic world achieved a high level of civilization by combining new methods with ancient technics and wisdom of China, India, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece around the Silk Road. Much praised European renaissance was also an outcome of interconnection of Europe with Asia through scholars' and students' mobility (Hobson 2004, Morris 2010, Frankopan 2015).

The new trend of internationalization of education can also be elaborated into a beneficial mechanism to achieve the further advancement of the Turkic civilization by Turkic Universities Union, which can act as an organization of regional cooperation for education to join the globalization process by combining national and regional priorities.

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This article aims to introduce the Orhun Exchange Programme initiated by the Turkic Universities Union. It gives fresh and original information about this recently launched programme and its background. It is claimed that this programme can be re-evaluated within the broader context of a renaissance for the Turkic peoples. It is argued that some recent developments, such as the shift of the economic gravity from the Atlantic Coast to the East via Turkic republics and achievements of Turkic republics in search for greater prosperity, build the possibility to accomplish a Turkic renaissance. The historical Silk Road had helped to exchange ideas and to accomplish scientific achievements within the Turkic realm. Now, Central Eurasia is gaining in significance, as a result of the end of the Cold War, independence of five more Turkic republics, foundation of joint organizations, such as the Turkic Council, the rise of the East and China's intention to revitalize the Silk Road linking itself to the West again. These changes create a potential for effective regional interconnection and scientific cooperation.

This research is a descriptive review study. In this study first, the historical Silk Road will be mentioned to show the previous achievements on the greater realm of Central Eurasia to prove that exchange of knowledge as a form of internationalization of education is not a novelty for the region. This golden age of scientific accomplishments in the Turkic and Islamic world also demonstrates that exchange of knowledge is a prerequisite for renaissance. The splendour of the Silk Road was based upon interregional trade, and economic interconnection is recently being revived after a long interruption. The current rise of the East with the shift of economic gravity from the West to the East creates new opportunities for the revival of the Silk Road, which will be mentioned in the next section. Then, the contemporary internationalization of education will be described through the example of Bologna Process. The establishment of the Turkic Council and Turkic Universities Union will also be explained, which will be followed by the initiation of the Orhun Process with original data about its aims, responses of member universities and its application.

1.1. Lessons from the Silk Road: Historical Roots of Internationalization

Before modern ages, students were travelling long distances to become disciples of eminent scholars, and they were realizing a kind of internationalization of education. In the Middle Ages in the realm of Islam young students were visiting faraway madrasas for education following a famous quote attributed to the prophet saying "Seek knowledge, as far as China". In its Golden Age (750-1258), Islam had spread from Morocco to recent Indonesia, Arabic became *lingua franca*, and Islamic scholarship formed the breeding ground of a new civilization (Berkey 2004: 204).

Asia was connected from eastern Mediterranean to China, from Kazan to India, which made Asia not only a vivid area, where exchange of goods was followed by exchange of ideas making Asia the centre of knowledge. Steward Gordon defines the period in his book "When Asia was the World" as follows:

[F]rom 500 to 1500, Asia was an astonishing, connected, and creative place. (...) It was in Asia that mathematicians invented zero and algebra. Astronomers there tracked the stars more accurately than ever before and invented the astrolabe for navigation. Poets and writers produced literature that still touches the heart. Philosophers generated systems of thinking and justice that influence us today (Gordon 2008: vii).

The interconnection of Asia started even earlier than Gordon mentions, when in the first century BCE China was linked to India and the Roman Empire formed a network of roads between China, Central Asia, the Steppes, Iran and the Near East called the Silk Road.

The Turkic peoples were positioned at the heart of the Silk Road, and cities, such as Kashgar, Samarkand, Herat, Tabriz, Bursa and Istanbul benefitted from this network of roads becoming cultural and economic centres. In the 15th century, Ottoman Empire on the one end of the Turkic world and Timurid realm in Central Asia developed to prominent economic and intellectual centres through interconnection. It was not unusual that apprentices in search of knowledge were visiting the other part of the Turkic world. For example, Ali al-Qushji (in Turkish, Ali Kuşçu), who was born in Samarkand and died in Istanbul (d. 1474), "was a philosopher-theologian, mathematician, astronomer, and linguist who produced original studies in both observational and theoretical astronomy within 15th-century Islamic and Ottoman astronomy" (Fazlıoğlu 2007: 946). He worked under the patronage of Timur's grandson Ulugh Beg, and then served to another Turkic ruler, Uzun Hasan in Tabriz, until finally joining Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (Fazlıoğlu

2007: 946-947). It is interesting to notice that his tutor, Qadizade al-Rumi (Bursali Kadizade Rumi) was born in Bursa (ca. 1359), but died in Samarkand (after 1440), who was a teacher of Ulugh Beg (Ragep 2007: 942). The exchange of ideas and amalgamation of views from different corners of the Turkic world relying upon the historical richness of the regional culture helped the Turkic world to contribute to the human civilization. Hence, the revival of regional cooperation will facilitate the renaissance of the Turkic civilization.

The European renaissance was also an outcome of intercultural exchange within a common educational zone. Scholars were travelling in Europe in search of knowledge under different scholars. As de Ridder-Symoens underlines: "The use of Latin as a common language, and a uniform programme of study and systems of examinations, enabled international students to continue their studies in one 'studium' after another, and ensured recognition of their degrees throughout Christendom." (De Ridder-Symoens 1992: 281)

The internationalization of education, however, broke down as a result of the rise of national education systems. The Bologna Process was a step to omit the national delimitation in Europe, which was confronted by resistance of national education systems.

1.2. Central Asia's Relocation to the Economic and Scientific Centre

After centuries-long interruption, the Silk Road is being revived again. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 opened Central Asia back to the wider world. First Turkey and then immediately other countries opened up their embassies in newly independent Central Asian republics launching their economic and political rapprochement. Post-Soviet countries aimed to join the greater world, which led of the establishment of joint organizations, such as the Turkic Council. Last decades of the 20th century saw economic rise of East Asia, and then in the 21st century China climbed to top with its economic boom making it the second biggest world economy with a prospect to become the biggest world economy replacing the USA.

Recent global developments are for the advantage of the Turkic countries, such as the shift of the world's economic centre of gravity. The Atlantic coast, which used to be the world's economic centre following the colonization process of Western European countries, is shifting from the Atlantic coast to East Asia, which increases the significance of the Turkic Council member countries. According to a research by Quah, the centre of gravity has shifted between 1980 and 2008 from mid-Atlantic to east of Helsinki and Bucharest, and he projected that until 2050 it would further move on to a location between India and China (Quah 2011: 3-9). It should not be forgotten that not only the east-west axis but also developing economies on the north-south axis, such as India and Russia, create a potential for prosperous regional cooperation (Gürbüz 2016: 83-87), and this increases the *centrality of Central Asia* between big economies of East Asia, EU, Russia and India.

In 2013, China announced the "One Belt, One Road Initiative" (OBOR) to revive the Silk Road. China launched projects worth of 1 trillion US\$ (Ryder 2017), and it aims "building infrastructure connectivity, and thus boosting free trade and people-to-people exchanges across Asia, Africa and Europe" (China Daily 2017). 68 countries are involved in this initiative with Central Asia at its heart.

Since 1960s, scientific gravity is also shifting from the West to the East with the rise of academic articles published in Japan, China, South Korea and India. East Asian countries entered the top countries with most Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE) articles, and the relative decline in the USA enhanced the shift. Another noteworthy trend is the rise of collaborative articles published by an international team of authors from institutions in different countries (Zhang et al 2015), which should also be taken into consideration for the sake of scientific cooperation among the Turkic countries.

The shift of economic and scientific centres of gravity will not lead directly to the development of Turkic countries by external changes, if they will not turn into active actors with plans designed to meet the requirements of the recent process and benefit from the shift. Otherwise, on-going globalization will encourage brain drain.

However, the present situation of scientific achievements in Turkic countries is not promising. Only Turkey among the Turkic Council member states could enter the list of Times Higher Education World University Rankings (980 universities in total) with 17 universities, whereas Asia continues to rise and balance the West by entering the list with 289 universities (Times Higher Education 2017). In the QS World University

Rankings 2016-2017 consisting of 916 universities, Turkey is presented by 11, Kazakhstan by 8, Azerbaijan by 3 universities (<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2016>).

Another problem for the Turkic Universities Union is the resistance of national education systems, which is a universal problem of internationalization of education.

The main priority of national education is preparing new generations according to national requirements and expectations. However, internationalization of education prioritizes harmonization of education systems to increase global mobility. Although reform is obligatory, national and regional interests need to be kept at the core.

2. Internationalization of Education and Bologna Process as an Example of Regional Scientific Cooperation

Internationalization of education in higher education has become an important concept of education in a globalizing world. Early forms of internationalization of education were realized as forms of "knowledge and student exchange" between education institutions. Today, global student mobility is among the fastest growing operational policies in strategic plans of universities. Student mobility and international learning experience of students are being encouraged by universities, and they are supported by states as part of global competition. Most universities are constantly revising their internationalization strategies with feedback from their graduates (De Wit, 2002: 5; Sowa, 2002; Nunan, 2006).

Internationalization of higher education will augment very rapidly in line with globalization. UNESCO declared that "students pursuing higher education abroad has more than doubled from 1.7 million (1995) to 4.1 million (2013)" (2016: 76). Projections made by the OECD predict that transnational higher education, including the mobility of students, faculty, and institutions, will grow and that international collaborations in academic research will increase (2009: 64). According to the projections for 2030, North America will continue to be a magnet for international students and academics and dominate scientific output by far, but "higher education systems in Asia and Europe will gradually increase their global influence" (OECD 2009: 14).

The Bologna Process initiated by the European Union (EU) is a well-known example of regional higher education reform in response to demands of globalization. The Bologna Process is understood as a "defensive reaction" of Europe regarding "the fierce competition against USA and Asian countries for global supremacy" (Koivula et al. 2009: 184).

It was, however, a challenge for the members of the EU to reform and harmonize their education systems, which were structured according to national requirements. The student exchange system was one of the first steps of this harmonization process, when in 1981 Erasmus Programme, which was taking its name from the European renaissance humanist and travelling scholar Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (Rotterdam 1466, 1536 Basel), but was also an abbreviation for "European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students", was launched with pilot students. It took a formal shape in 1987 with 3,244 students from 11 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom) (Erasmus+, 2017).

However, the harmonization of education provoked reaction from EU members, and it cannot be added to the agenda of the Union until the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which was formally the foundation stone of the EU (De Wit 2015: 8). The higher education systems in Europe were organized according to different viewpoints on "state regulation, the university governance, competition and funding base", and they were classified in four groups as Anglo-Saxon (UK), Western (or Continental) European (France, Spain, Germany), Nordic (Scandinavian) and Central and Eastern European model. Western model is further divided to Humboldtian model of Germany and Napoleonic model of France and Spain. (Koivula et al. 2009: 184).

German Humboldtian model is based on *Bildung*, which emphasizes the holistic development of human beings, as Alexander von Humboldt has proposed in 1851: "The real aim of human beings is not what the changing tendency but what the eternally unchanging him prescribes – is the highest and most proportional formation [Bildung] of its forces into a whole" (Humboldt 1851: 9; Koivula et al. 2009: 185). The Humboldtian model aims to create enlightened humanitarians educated in all aspects of knowledge, and the

universities were founded as research centres, where students were trained through independent and objective research processes.

The French Napoleonic model of higher education, on the other hand, was based upon state-controlled, centralized universities, where the main aim was educating the specialists demanded by the state, which was transforming universities into institutions of professional and specialized education (Doh et al. 2017: 2, 6).

The Anglo-Saxon model is a liberal model, which is “a large-scale market-driven, diversified, and hierarchical system where competition between institutions is general.” This was originally a feature of US universities, which was adapted by the UK after 1980s. Universities in UK are different from Continental universities as they are legally and financially independent from the state. Here, “higher education institutions sell their services to the State and consumers”, and “a regular research assessment system has strong consequences for the university funding.” (Koivula et al. 2009: 185).

To the contrary of the Anglo-Saxon model, the Nordic proposes that “equal opportunities increase well-being”, and instead of a diversified, competitive, liberal education market, Nordic model maintains homogenous and equal higher education institutions. They are controlled and funded by the state, which makes education free of charge (Koivula et al. 2009: 185).

The Central and Eastern European model was based on training “highly qualified work force”. The system was quite elitist labour market-led polytechnic system.” (Koivula et al. 2009: 185). This was shared with the education system of the Turkic republics in the USSR until 1991. In 1990s, they – together with other post-Soviet republics - transformed their education system by adjusting to the market economy. Consequently, they encouraged opening private schools and universities as part of privatization policy. Accordingly, foreign education institutions were also permitted to operate for the integration to the global system. However the states were slow to describe a new higher education system accommodating changes, and these profit-oriented but uncontrolled and unqualified higher education institutions of Eastern Europe without accreditation and academic recognition were the main reason behind the establishment of the Bologna Process (YÖK 2007: 21), and the emphasis on accountability and quality standards are directly related with these unsophisticated institutions.

Based on those different traditions in Europe, there was strong opposition on the national level against harmonization of education, especially in countries with deeply rooted educational systems, such as France, Germany, Italy and the UK. The crucial step towards change was achieved by a declaration signed by ministers of education of those countries in Paris, in 1998. The reason behind the common step of these four forerunners of the European Community (EC) was not a reflection of their corresponding governments, citizens or even the EC but rather they “acted deliberately as representatives of their national governments, outside the context of the European Commission” (De Wit 2015: 8-9). It was actually an act to bypass their national bureaucratic and political process and clearly a play of *fait accompli* to avoid public protest.

[T]he United Kingdom needed France, Italy, and Germany to convince the British public of the advantages of a joint initiative to harmonize European higher education with the British system. The Germans, for their part, needed the support of the other countries to sell a plan at home to introduce the bachelor’s and master’s degree structure. And the French and Italians needed the others to convince their publics of the need for reform of their higher education systems, something that had previously always been blocked by massive protests (De Wit 2015: 8-9).

Ministers of education acted together to avoid opposition on the national and supranational level. For legitimizing their attempt they declared that the EU should be more than just a unity of “the Euro, of the banks and economy” but that “it must be a Europe of knowledge as well”, and they called to “strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent” and “to consolidate Europe’s standing in the world through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens” (Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998).

The declaration found positive response; expect the term “harmonization”, which had to be replaced by “actions which may foster the desired convergence and transparency in qualification structures in Europe”. Consequently, the next meeting in Bologna became a cornerstone in the transformation of European higher education system, known as the Bologna Process (De Wit 2015: 9).

3. Turkic Council and Establishment of the Turkic Universities Union

The process leading to the foundation of the Turkic Council (Cooperation Council of the Turkic Speaking States) has been initiated by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan at the “First Summit of the Heads of Turkic Speaking States” in Ankara in 1992 (Turkic Council, 2014: 1). The organization accepted to function “as an umbrella organization for the cooperation mechanisms among the Turkic Speaking States”, and “TURKSOY” (International Organization of Turkic Culture, 1993), “TURKPA” (Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries, 2008), “Turkic Academy” (2010), “Turkic Business Council” (2011), “Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation” (2012) were founded as affiliated, joint organizations to accomplish cooperation (Turkic Council 2014: 3-4).

A significant cornerstone in the process was the establishment of the Turkic Council through the Nakhchivan Agreement at the Summit in Nakhchivan in 2009. The founding and current members of the Council are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey; and the main aim was declared as promoting “comprehensive cooperation among Turkic states” (Turkic Council, 2014: 1). The ninth point of the Nakhchivan Agreement is about “expanding interaction in the fields of science, technology, education and culture”, which led to the establishment of the Turkic Universities Union (Turkic Council 2014: 3).

On October 21, 2011, in Almaty “The Declaration of the First Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States” acknowledged that the Summit “[w]elcomed the initiative to establish Turkic Interuniversity Union [Turkic Universities Union], noting that such projects will contribute to the further development of relations between scientific institutions, educational institutions and scientists, as well as providing enriching experiences for university students” (Turkic Council 2011: 5). On August 22-23, 2012, it was added to “The Declaration of the Second Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States”, in Bishkek (Turkic Council 2012: 3).

The first meeting of rectors and/or vice-rectors of 15 universities from 4 member states for the establishment of the Turkic Universities Union was held in Istanbul on March 28-29, 2013, when the Istanbul Declaration was prepared. The founding members of the Union were: Baku State University, Azerbaijan Medical University, Azerbaijan University of Architecture from Azerbaijan; Al-Farabi Kazakh National University L.N. Gumilov Eurasian National University, Akhmet Yassawi University, Nazarbayev University from Kazakhstan; Kyrgyz National University, Bishkek Humanities University, International University of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University from Kyrgyzstan; Istanbul University, Ege University, Atatürk University, Eskişehir Osmangazi University from Turkey (Mert 2015: 282).

On the second meeting in Bishkek in May 2013 “The Directive for the Establishment of the Turkic University Union and its Higher Education Area” was adopted (<http://www.turkkon.org/en-US/turkic-council-turkic-university-union-1st-general-assembly-will-be-hosted-by-the-ata-turk-university-in-erzurum/301/1130/1130/708> [Last retrieved on 27.07.2017]). On August 16, 2013, “The Declaration of the Third Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States”, in Gabbala, “welcomed the founding meetings of the Turkic Inter-University Union held in Istanbul and Bishkek, and instructed the relevant Ministries and state institutions to implement measures for realization of the goals of the Union” (Turkic Council 2013: 2).

During these meetings the aim of enhancing cooperation in higher education among the member states was underlined, and projects including student and academic staff exchange programmes, namely “Orhun Process”, were decided to be initiated. Additionally, the establishment of the “Student Council of the University Union” and “Quality Assurance Council” were among the first decisions of the Union. The objectives of the Turkic Universities Union were defined as follows:

- “Training of common identity conscious to the next generation by practicing appropriate education system in the sphere of modern scientific level, taking into account common history, culture and language to provide cooperation agreements between.

- Implementation of common credit transfer system,
- Encourage teaching-staff training programmes,
- The implementation of students and teaching-staff exchange programmes,
- The creation of appropriate conditions for recognizing the equivalence of diplomas between member universities,
- Benefiting from the outstanding superiority in certain areas of universities,
- Joint training for implementation and execution of the research programmes and projects,
- Arranging competitions in science and sport; organize symposiums, academic activities, cultural activities among Member Universities,
- Providing special scholarships for students who conduct studies on the Turkic world,
- Giving courses on common history, culture and literature to universities of all member states.” (<http://turkunib.org/en/#about> [Last retrieved on 05.09.2018])

It was not an easy task to establish a union of Turkic countries. Similar to the example of the EU mentioned above, there are also differences in education systems of Turkic countries. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan share common characteristics with the Central and Eastern European model, which was defined above by Koivula and Rinne as focusing “most of all [on] the training of highly qualified work force. The system was quite elitist labour market-led polytechnic system. HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] were strongly controlled by the state and the system was centralized and ideological” (Koivula et al. 2009: 185).

After the breakdown of the USSR, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had to transform their higher education in order to adapt to the market economy. The demand of the market and the labour force had changed with the closure of collective farms and transformation of factories and bureaucratic state apparatus, which were the main branches of employment. The universities had to transform themselves to meet the demands of a flexible market, which was replacing the planned economy.

They had to educate more graduates for the service sector, and there was a special need for entrepreneurs and a new generation, which had to be flexible in adapting to the dynamism brought by globalization. While a planned economy required relatively a stable and hierarchical work place, market economy demanded more dynamic and flexible work force. In this period of transition many makeshift higher education institutions were opened in Central Asia. Similar to the experience of the EU, also these unqualified higher education institutions without academic recognition require international accreditation through organizations, such as the Turkic Universities Union.

Turkish higher education system, on the other hand, was formed according to Continental European model –more exactly German Humboldtian model - after 1933, but it was modified to the Anglo-Saxon model with the establishment of the Council of Higher Education in 1981, and recently Turkey adjusted to Bologna Process and also joined European Higher Education Area (EHEA) qualifying in its requirements.

3.1. The Orhun Exchange Programme

On 16-17 October 2014, the First General Assembly of the Union was organized at the Chairing University, Atatürk University, in Erzurum, Turkey, where the urgency of the implementation of the Orhun Exchange Programme was underlined as the main subject (Mert 2015: 285). Additionally, the establishment of the Turkic Universities Union Student Council and its Directive was accepted by member universities, which was ratified by the Ministers of Education of the Turkic Council, on November 27-28 2014 (Mert 2015: 285). The goal of the Student Council, which was first chaired by the Atatürk University, was declared as “providing and developing cooperation among students of Member Universities on the fields of education, sports and culture” (<http://turkunib.org/en/#about> [Last retrieved on 05.09.2018]).

During the First General Assembly, the need for a quality assurance system, cooperation with the Turkic Academy, announcements of international congresses by member universities were also discussed. Furthermore, Osman Mert from the Atatürk University offered a project for common citizenship education in Turkic countries. Finally, Secretary General of the Turkic Council Ramil Hasanov reminded that during

the Bodrum Summit it was decided to organize “Universiad” (Sports Games) between member university students, in 2015 (Mert 2015: 286-289).

After the Assembly country reports were demanded by the Turkic Council from member countries about the implementation of the Orhun Exchange Programme. The Orhun process has been studied in detail on the subjects of common language, curriculum, credit transfer, evaluation system and financial problems, which were essential for internationalization of higher education, before the implementation of the pilot programme in a competitive, global arena. Consequently, reports from three member states – except Turkey, where universities are already credited within the Bologna Process - were finalized and sent to the Turkic Council.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan declared that they have already sent and accepted students to partner universities in the framework of Mevlana and Erasmus+ programmes, and their universities provide dormitories to exchange students and academics.

Kazakhstan is a partner country of the Bologna Process since 2011, and they reminded that all of its member universities have already implemented European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

All three universities of Kyrgyzstan affirmed that they recognize credits and course grades received by exchange students at partner universities.

Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan emphasized that a standard chart for grade conversion has to be developed.

All member universities of three countries evaluated the launch of Orhun Exchange Programme as appropriate, and they were willing to join the pilot programme, but they also expressed that it is obligatory to provide financial support by member states for a successful operation of the programme. Kazakhstan also announced that a student necessitates \$ 350 per month to live in Kazakhstan.

The universities have generally emphasized the need to exchange information about education processes, training plans and programmes within the Union. Regarding the Orhun process, it is seen that all members are in fact interested with the implementation of the Orhun Exchange Programme, but they have stated that problems of finance, common curriculum, credit, evaluation system and language should be solved.

During the initiation of the Bologna process similar problems, such as language, financial problems and process of recognition of qualifications were also mentioned, but they were solved in time within a longer process after the launch of the programme (Kajberg 2004; West et al., 2001). Thus, internationalization of higher education can be considered as a process of continuous improvement and self-renewal.

The Second General Assembly was also held at the Atatürk University, on April 12, 2016. During the Assembly, the Rector of Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University (KTMU), Prof.Dr. Sebahattin Balcı, was elected to replace the Rector of Atatürk University, Prof.Dr Hikmet Koçak, as the Chairman of the Union. Bitlis Eren University from Turkey is accepted as the 16th member of the Turkic Universities Union. The decisions about the Orhun Exchange Programme and Student Council were ratified as well.

The First Meeting of the Student Council was held with student representatives of member universities in Bishkek on 24-27 November 2016. After energetic discussions of young representatives, 19 decisions concerning future joint activities, projects, events between member universities were taken. The foundation of the Student Council was a significant step in the internationalization of education through association and friendship of young generations to build a common future.

On April 6-7, 2017, at the meeting organized by the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University [KTMU] in Bishkek “The Regulation of the Orhun Exchange Pilot Programme” was confirmed. The pilot programme was introduced for academics and undergraduate students from departments of International Relations and Politics, starting from the academic year 2017-18.

In the first year of the exchange programme 43 students and 2 academic staff from 6 universities applied to the programme; 11 of them voluntarily waived, 10 students and 1 teaching staff were not accepted for not complying with programme requirements. Thus, during this academic year, 22 students and 1 academic staff had participated in the Orhun Exchange Programme.

On April 19, 2018, Third General Assembly was held at the KTMU. In its presentation KTMU declared that in the past two years of its term they gave precedence to form an institutional identity for the Turkic Universities Union, and the logo and web-site (www.turkunib.org [Last retrieved on 05.09.2018]) of the Union were prepared. To increase the activities of the Union and develop friendly relations between

students “The First Turkic Universities Sports Games” were organized with more than 300 participants from 5 universities, including 221 athletes, 40 coaches and 11 caretakers, at KTMU, on May 15-19, 2017. It was decided that “The Second Turkic Universities Sports Games” will be held at the Akhmet Yassawi University in Türkistan, in 2019.

KTMU has presented three publications as results of conducted projects: “Turkic World Tourism Guide”, “Common Relations and Cooperation in the Countries of the Turkic Council after 25 Years of Experience” (Gürbüz, 2018), “Common Citizenship Education in the Turkic World” (Dündar et al. 2018). These projects were presented to the Turkic Council as works of the Turkic Universities Union to build a common future.

During the Third General Assembly, “Turkic Council Turkic University Union Award Directive” prepared by the KTMU was accepted “regarding the awards to be given by the Turkic Council to scientists, academicians, artists and experts who have conducted original scientific researches on the common history, languages and literature of the Turkic peoples”. A draft of Turkic Index prepared by KTMU was also presented and accepted to be elaborated under the next Chairing University.

The Union Chairmanship was transferred to the Akhmet Yassawi University in accordance with the resolution of the Second General Assembly.

As a result of the first year’s success of the Orhun Exchange Programme, it was extended by adding Turkology to recognized departments along with International Relations and Politics. Also the number of member universities increased from 16 to 19 with the acceptance of Azerbaijan University of Languages, Atyrau State University from Kazakhstan and Osh State University from Kyrgyzstan. The Directive of the Union was revised with amendments for the application of further member universities.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In an age, when knowledge has become the main prerequisite of development, universities enhanced their role in the advancement of countries. Additionally, globalization increased mobility of academics enabling the exchange of knowledge, which is fundamental for the revival of the Turkic civilization.

The shift of economic and scientific centres of gravity of the world from Western Europe to East Asia brings members of the Turkic Universities Union to the focal point. They are also at the focal point of growing economies on all four directions from Russia to India, from East Asia to the Atlantic coast and have the potential of benefitting economically and scientifically by interconnecting them. Not only the geographical location and physical proximity create a potential for Turkic Universities Union as a whole but also their cultural links have something in common with all corners of Eurasia, which is a unique asset to be appraised.

These global developments prepare a fertile ground for developing scientific research among Turkic republics, but it cannot be achieved without a well-planned common agenda. Turkic countries should help each other in their fields of superiority for a joint development. This, however, is not unchallenged, as the recent scientific level of Turkic countries is far beyond the top ten countries in scientific excellence. Moreover, it is not an easy task to adapt national education to international systems, but it is also true that regional collaboration will help to the escalation of the region as a whole, and this can also help to reverse brain drain.

The Orhun Exchange Programme is at the heart of adjusting to the requirements of internationalization of education, shift of global economic and scientific centres, growing importance of knowledge and formulation a response to global brain drain. This process with its prospect to form a qualified education in Turkic countries can become a model for the wider Turkic world and can help with persistent and well-studied policies to found the Turkic Higher Education Area for the further development of Turkic countries. Thus it can be appropriated as one of the vital vehicles for the renaissance of the Turkic world.

For the further development of the Orhun Exchange Programme the following points are worth to be emphasized:

- The initial steps and necessary precautions of the pilot programme should be analysed carefully.
- It is necessary to plan joint programmes, interaction and harmony in terms of academic language

and the programmes.

- The results of publications and researches on exchange programs should be analysed permanently, and the results should be immediately admitted to the implementation of the programme, as it is the case in the implementation of the Bologna Process.
- The Orhun Credit Transfer System which includes the credit transfer of the students participating in the Orhun Exchange Programme should be compatible with the Bologna Process and ECTS in the global competitive environment.
- The academic calendars, course contents and departmental processes should be unified among the member universities and later within the Turkic Higher Education Area.
- The equivalence of the courses and departments should be considered and studied in the pilot implementation process. The quotas related to students and faculty members within the scope of mobility, financial problems accommodation and social processes should be planned in the light of experiences gained from exchange programmes, such as Erasmus, Farabi, Mevlana.

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