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**Öz**

Uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği, küreselleşmenin sonuçlarından biridir. Tıpkı işgücünün, malların ve finansın dolaşımı gibi, öğrenciler de yükseköğrenim için yurt dışına seyahat etmektedir. Bu süreç genellikle ABD’de ve İngiltere, Fransa ve Almanya gibi bazı Batı Avrupa ülkelerinde kaynak bulan Batılı yöntemlere atfedilir. Bu ülkeler tarafından yürütülen politikalar ve uygulamalar, ana akım küresel öğrenci hareketliliğini temsil etmekte ve Batılılaşmış bir uluslararasılaşma sürecini ortaya koymaktadır. Öte yandan, bu küresel süreç içinde, standartlaştırılmış Batılı süreçlerin dışında özgün yönler sergileyen, Batı dışı bölge ve ülkeler tarafından takip edilen ve literatürde ihmal edilmiş politika ve uygulamalar da bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliğinin tarihi, bölgesel ve kültürel arka planı uluslararası öğrenciler için itme ve çekme faktörleri olarak ele almamıza izin veren bu ihmal edilmiş yönü incelenmiştir. Bu bakış açısını desteklemek için Latin Amerika, Asya-Pasifik ve Türkiye’deki uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği ve uluslararasılaşma politikaları ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmada uluslararası öğrenci profilleri ve seçilen bölgelerin ulusötesi bölgesel uygulamaları tartışmaya açılmıştır.

**Abstract**

International student mobility is one of the consequences of globalization. Just like the circulation of labour, goods and finance, students travel abroad to get higher education. This process is generally attributed to Western methods sourced in the US and some of the Western European countries such as the UK, France and Germany. Policies and implementations maintained by these countries represent the mainstream global student mobility and illustrate Westernized way of internationalization. On the other hand, within this global process, there are also neglected policies and implementations followed by non-Western regions and countries, which demonstrate unique aspects other than standardized Western processes. In this paper, this neglected side of international student mobility that let us to consider historical, regional and cultural background as push and pull factors for international students has been examined. In order to support this perspective, international student mobility and internationalization policies in Latin America, Asia-Pacific and Turkey were dealt with. In this investigation, international student profiles and transnational regional implementations of selected regions were incorporated into discussion.

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization process has been effecting many areas and sectors in today's world. Education, specifically tertiary education, is one of the platforms where the globalization makes itself visible and active. Like the circulation of finance, labour and goods, students who continue their education out of their home countries contribute to globalization and they represent a new type of migration by being incorporated in the universities abroad.

Internationalization of higher education through student mobility is initially rooted in the implementations of some of the Western countries such as the US and UK. Dominant character of this process is based heavily on the expectations of information society and global marketplace. In this respect, global student mobility might be read as a sub-dimension of neo-liberal socioeconomic and educational system of global world.

When looking at mainstream theories and arguments, the scenario for international student mobility lets us to observe the diffusion of Western values, pedagogical tools, curricula, campus formations, etc. On the other hand, the design of an "international student" consists of competitive, skill-based, ambitious, and market-oriented features during and after his/her education abroad. In addition, due to the "global mission" they (are) burden(ed), these students are supposed to contribute to global economies by benefitting from the advantages of Western education and its outputs. That is why, the major routes for these students appear as "from the East to the West" or "from the South to the North". According to the rationale and consequences of these one-directional routes in the social scientific literature, countries in the West and North recruit the students of the East and South.

While such a flow in favour of Western and Northern countries reflect the reality to a large extent, new routes and pull factors for international students, which are directed and released by non-Western and non-Northern countries, become much more visible day by day. Besides keeping the background of Western-oriented education and market contexts, countries that might be called "new actors" in global student mobility demonstrate unique and regional outputs. Recent developments in the World such as the collapse of Soviet Union, economic and cultural initiations of some specific Asian countries, regional developments in Latin America, etc. are some of the reasons behind the emergent internationalization phenomenon that covers student mobility. In addition to this, regionalization perspective can also be applied to international student reality of Western countries, which have formed mainstream perspective and routes in this area.

In this article social, cultural, religious, geographical and historical reasons that form new routes in international education will be examined. In relation to this, article also claims that old and major actors of student mobility, which were mentioned above, keep the regional reflexes in addition to mainstream globalization discourse and implementations. In order to support this assertion and clarify the theoretical and practical sides of alternative routes in international student mobility, some of the both Western and non-Western countries and regions will be analysed in terms of some criteria: Inbound international student profile of these counties/regions, student exchange and/or other academic programs and agreements between neighbouring countries/regions, expectations of nation-states from the students of neighbouring countries/regions. By taking these criteria into consideration, reflections that would be evaluated as regionalization in international higher education in Latin America, Asia Pacific and Turkey, the countries and regions located on the different parts of the globe, will be searched for. In this way, an alternative perspective and theoretical background, which is based on geographic and historical ties among sending and receiving countries for international students, beside Western-oriented process would be highlighted in specific to internationalization of higher education.

## 2. A Short Overview on International Student Mobility in Global World

Although international student mobility can be traced back in earlier times in history, dynamics of today's international education are mostly generated by the globalization process, which started to make itself visible and attractive in the second half of 20th century. As in the circulation of goods, labour and finance, circulation of people around the world can also be represented by international student mobility (Cabrera and Renard, 2014, p. 11). Especially, after WW2, such a mobility became an area where the Soviet and Western block compete each other (Tsvetkova, 2008). Besides being a competition area, it can be said that global information society appears as one of the other important rationales behind rapidly increasing international student mobility in the world. The need for academic and technical information, using this in appropriate circumstances push and lead students and families to be interested more in international education in favour of self-improvement and making a good career in global business sector (Lerch and Buckner, 2018). On the other hand, considering international students as the potential soft power and public diplomacy means (Pritchard, 2010) by the nation states over the other countries makes this population crucial. Scholarships provided by nation states for the students of other (in many cases, "target") countries, which aim to culturally and educationally advertise the country and provide thankfulness by funded students to the country, have been much more visible and available today.

When looking at the main routes of students' flow between the countries and regions, the dominance of Western countries as the "playmaker" can be observed. This situation is rooted on some of the historical facts of modernity and the place of Western world on this situation. First, institutionalization of education in social life as a new professional area has started in Western world in modern period (Larsen, 2016, p. 79). Especially, formation of universities, where the subject of international students is mainly discussed in, and depicting tertiary education as a "must" for a person coincides with the modern university systems in Europe. That is why, the main route of international students is based

heavily on from the East to the West. Due to this fact that has been lasting for many decades, The US, UK, Canada, Germany and France as Western countries constitute the “big five”, which characterizes the main target countries for international students (Kell and Vogl, 2012).

Universities in the “big five” provide a frame for internationalization practices in all levels. Implementations, rules and policies before and after the arrival of international students, making campuses more international, maintaining international collaborations, employing international academic staff, giving importance to international offices, giving some priorities to and providing special facilities for international students, keeping in touch with alumni international students, etc. are some of the main reasons that make these countries play maker. The reasons mentioned above and the place of the countries in modern world characterize the main “pull factors”, which theoretically emphasize the advantages of target countries in terms of international student mobility. Among this factors are the quality and capacity of tertiary education, facilities provided for international students, life quality and safety in that country, job opportunities after graduation, etc. (Knight, 2012).

When looking at the international student policies and implementations of some of the non-Western countries, it can be observed that the big five is followed by them in many aspects including pull factors. This means that universities in non-Western countries make some arrangements that were mentioned above to recruit more international students, and more generally, to survive in information society and take the position in global tertiary education market (Becker, 2010, p. 4).

In conclusion, it can be asserted that the formation of international education exists in line with historical and contemporary implementations of Western countries. Dominant character of internationalization and international student mobility brings us to the reflections from Western universities. Majority of such an educational “culture” (de Wit, 1999) also forms the literature of internationalization in higher education in global world. For that reason, academic texts on the internationalization and international students tend to discuss this issue around the Western-oriented patterns for both Western and non-Western countries.

On the other hand, while approving this majority of Western tertiary education and the route of international student mobility in favour of West, there are also some emerging routes and policies regarding internationalization in higher education in non-Western countries, which are less discussed in social scientific literature and overshadowed by Western paradigm.

### **3. Proximity, Culture and Language: Re-Considering Historical and Geographical Ties as Pull Factors**

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As in the other social, cultural, economic, etc. outputs in the social sciences, the subject of international student mobility and policies are generally dominated by the theories and arguments of Western paradigm handled in previous part. Global flow-speak (Bude and Dürschmidt, 2010), one of the main triggers of this situation, makes itself visible on international students, too. However, both the reality inferred from the statistical data and some academic works might let us questioning the dominant social scientific insight on international student mobility and policy in favour of West(ern countries) and finding some of the unique features of this area occurred in non-Western countries.

Despite following the global “template” of big five in international higher education implementations, it can be observed that regional pull (and push) factors start to become more visible in international student mobility. These factors let us to question mainstream theories about and routes of international higher education recommended and applied by Western countries. In theoretical base, new routes demonstrate that one-sided mobility of internationalization from East to West could no more explain social, cultural and educational background of the policies inside East. On the other hand, practical reflections of these routes differ from Western-oriented international higher education.

As a neglected side of this subject, alternative routes might be traced on the international student profile of non-Western countries. The reality of pull factors composed of geographical, cultural, religious and language proximity (Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, 2006, p. 102). Fieldworks on this area approve that decision-making process of an international student in terms of selecting a target country is also affected by these factors. For instance, besides the reputation of a university, quality of education, job opportunities after graduation; a student also considers the distance between his own country and the target country for higher education abroad. Language proximity is another dimension. For another example, in order not to struggle for learning a new language, students may opt to get tertiary education in a foreign country where his/her mother tongue is spoken (Ahmad, Buchanan and Ahmad, 2016, p. 1098). Sometimes, religious background of target country may play a crucial role for international students. As it will be seen on the sub-section below, Muslim-based countries are likely to host Muslim students from different countries. This side is about the pull factors maintained by public authorities and university managements. In addition to this, (Islamic) religious background serves as a bridge for a Muslim international student to go to another Muslim-based country as a pull factor (Hailat et al., 2021). We may also mention cultural and/or ethnic background in relation to pull factors determined by religion. By being also fed by language proximity, ethnic background of a student might serve as a pull factor to the countries that share the same ethnic majority with the prospective student. In other words, ethnic origin of an individual pushes him/her to go another country where the similar ethnic groups are dominant. For example, majority of international students in Turkey coming from Turkic countries approves this pull factors in international education.

In addition to individual initiations, perceptions and practices in the face of religion, culture, history and language, policies of nation states on their regional circle become important to recruit international students. Independently of the quality of higher education inside, political and cultural popularity of a country on its region may play a crucial role in terms of “pulling” international students from closer countries (Sidhu et al., 2021). Of course, economic, academic and educational initiations of target country effect the choices of prospective international students to opt them; however, rapid development of a country in regional league or milieu may direct students more to get education in this country. Such a relation or selection can also be read as the success of target country in soft power and public diplomacy (Amirbek and Ydyrys, 2014), which are also noticed (and actually rooted) in the policy making processes of Western countries. In information society, it seems that some of the nation states are aware of the importance of education in establishing bonds and keeping the national interests over the other countries through international students and tertiary education.

Lastly, in order to explore the influence of historical ties for both states and individuals as pull factors, colonial past of a country and colonial relationships among countries in the past may also be incorporated in discussion. It is a widely-accepted reality and result in the internationalization of higher education that the students of a colonized country tend to go to former colonizing country due to political and historical reasons while colonizing countries also attempt to recruit students from their former colonies (Walker, 2014, p. 329).

We may conclude that internationalization of higher education in the world demonstrate more than Westernization and purely educational quality and purposes. Although Western countries also make effort on this neglected dimensions in mainstream social scientific literature, alternative routes essentially approve the increasing and on-going role of non-Western countries. That is why, internationalization in higher education also has long been identified as “regionalization” (Knight, 2008). Among the main rationales and practices of regionalization are, as emphasized and shortly explained in this part, the proximity about geographical location, language, culture, religion and relationships in the past. In the next part, this assertion and alternative theoretical background based on pull factors of recruiting countries have been analysed by highlighting the international student policies, implementations and main profiles in selected regions and countries.

## 4. Examining Selected Regions and Countries

In order to understand the role of regionalization fed by geographic and historical ties in a more concrete way, some of the selected regions and countries will be analysed in the face of the majority of their international student profile, policies implemented by them that would let us to discover regionalization in higher education, and international collaborations in tertiary education, which would support the regional outputs. When configuring this part, mainly, target countries that might be identified as “new players” in international education beside “big five” have been selected from different parts of the globe. By doing this, it was proposed to shed light on the validity of assumed regionalization in a wider context. To succeed this, in this part, statistical data will be benefited as well as theoretical discussions and findings in social scientific literature.

### 4.1. Latin America

As the first investigation area of this paper, Latin America region has been selected to search for the place of history, geography and culture in international student mobility and internationalization policies. Especially, colonial past of the continent and the effect of Spanish and Portuguese languages are the main points where the discussions on regionalism in international education are held.

As the other non-Western countries and regions, Latin American governments and universities basically follow the implementations and goals of big five in internationalization. For Uribe-Roldan (2014, p. 203), these policies and their reflections in academic world are transferred from the main actors of internationalization in West and North by Latin American bureaucrats and university managements. In addition to transfer process mentioned above, nation-state formations in the 21st century in Latin American continent plays a crucial role in international student mobility. Most of the independent nations follow national/local policies in higher education to keep up with global information society (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 9).

To observe the regional side of international higher education in Latin America, collaborations in both inner circle of the continent and relationships with two main colonial countries, Spain and Portugal, can be mentioned. It should be stated that these collaborations are not limited to educational policies and implementations; however, higher education and internationalization process are definitely included in this regional initiations. For example, the platform of Southern Common Market, known as MERCOSUR, between some of the Latin American countries provide empirical frame and data about the issue. Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Suriname, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Venezuela and Uruguay are the countries of MERCOSUR and thanks to the idea and practice of “common market”, educational policies and implementations, especially in higher education level, are mutually supported by the subjected countries (Theiler, 2005, s. 80). Specifically, SEM (Education Sector of Mercosur) serves directly to international student mobility of Latinos and increase the institutional capacity of the universities inside Latin America (Perrotta, 2016, p. 200). Lastly, the platform MERCOSUR also supports and encourages collaborations among Latin America and European Union.

According to European Commission (2020) report, educational corporations among these two regions are detailed in favour of the mobility.

Common usage of Spanish and Portuguese languages in this region seems as an advantage for students from different countries in region. This opportunity reflects on the international student profiles of the countries. In relation to this, Latina region provides students around the world with the opportunity of learning and developing Spanish language. especially from the North America, to learn Spanish language (Gacel-Avila, 2007, p. 403).

Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) is another transnational organization rooted in Latin America. As can be guessed, this platform mainly deals with the relations of Latin American countries with Portugal and countries speaking Portuguese inside the region (Sanchez, 2014). Since 1996, this platform welcomes educational collaborations between Latin American countries and also Portugal as well as collaborations on health, technology and industry (Herpolsheimer, 2015, p. 21).

Like Portugal, Spain also maintains cultural, economic and educational relations with Latin American countries as one of the former colonizing powers on the region. Before examining Spain's ongoing relations with this region, steps taken by this country to internationalize the higher education sector could shortly be investigated. For example, Spain proposes to recruit more European students to Spanish universities in order to keep up with global information society and strengthen its European identity (Levatino et al., 2018, p. 369). Some of the other related implementations and policies can also be observed on Spanish higher education sector. On the other hand, in relation to the main problem of this article, Spanish governments involve in Latin American higher education market by recruiting Hispanic students in Spanish universities. Ibero- American Program of Science and Technology for Development (CYTED) is one of the platforms that Spain takes highly active role by providing scholarships for Hispanic students, maintaining mutual academic and technological projects with the universities in Latin America since 1984 (Soler, 2014).

Intergovernmental agreements, collaborations, policymaking processes and other initiations that approves the regional, historical and cultural relations between Portugal, Spain and Latin America finds a reflection area on the main international student profiles and statistics in these countries. Before student exchange rates and numbers inside Latin American countries, international student profiles of Portugal and Spain can shortly be visited. According to up-to-date data retrieved from UNESCO Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, Portugal hosts over 35.000 international students and approximately 16.000 Brazilian students dominate this profile (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). Cape Verde and Angola, the former colonies of Portugal in Africa, takes the second and third place on the stage. Although Cape Verde and Angola are not located in Latin America, by taking the second and third place in international student profile of Portuguese universities, they also approve the traces of colonial past in international student mobility.

The ratio and numbers of international students in Spain also approves the relationship and consequences put for Portugal above. Perhaps, as one of the consequences of Europeanization initiations of Spain, France takes the first stage in international student profile by over 9.000 French students registered at Spanish universities (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). After France, Ecuador and Colombia as the Latin American countries take the second and third stage by their 7.283 and 6.669 students respectively and other major sending countries in Spain are also followed by Mexico (3.143), Peru (2.705) and Chile (2423) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). When looking at approximate total number of Latin American international students in Spanish, over 30.000 Hispanic students out of total 77.000 international students are registered at Spanish universities (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022).

International student profile of Portugal and Spain was investigated in order to show the majority of the Latin American region in these countries. Such a picture approves the pull factors of former colonizer powers on colonized geographies and this would prove the place of history (and partly culture) in international student mobility. On the other hand, examining inter-Latin American international student mobility could provide the proof on the effect of history, regional proximity, language and culture in this area. For example, international student profile of Argentina, hosting over 116.000 international students in total, are dominated by Venezuelan (10.804), Chilean (6.606), Ecuadorian (5.554), Uruguayan (3.567), and Mexican (804) students (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). This means that 1 out of 4 international students in Argentina has the Latin American nationality. Similarly, Brazil, a Portuguese speaking country hosts 21.803 international students and this number is dominated by other Latin American countries as 1,729 students from Colombia, 1.472 from Peru, 1.331 from Paraguay, 1.131 from Bolivia, 610 from Venezuela and 1.057 from Argentina (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). This means that total number of the students coming from these countries in Brazil exceeds 10.000, so almost half of the international students in Brazil is sourced in Latin America. In addition to this data inside Hispanic geography, there are 1,785 Angolan students who represent the top position in international student profile of Brazil (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). When remembering that Angola is also a former colonized country of Portugal and speaks Portuguese language, the role of culture, history and language in international student mobility can be approved again.

As a result, data generated from the statistics and intergovernmental organizations and collaboration between Spain, Portugal and Latin America, also inner student mobility in this region could show us that historical, cultural and geographical proximity plays an important role in internationalization policies and student profiles of nation states.

## 4.2. Asia-Pacific

Nation states and universities in Asia-Pacific region are subjected to a new conceptualization in internationalization: Education Hub. According to Knight (2014, p. 30), education hubs refer to the transnational higher education activities of an even more globalized world and to “attract international students” to a country, region or city, “technology and innovation activities” or to “provide professional education” in a particular subject in terms of perspective and activities. By the globalizing initiations of nation states, Asia-Pacific becomes an attraction point for both investors and educational administrators in university and state level (Shin and Harman, 2009). Even, it is also discussed that Asia-Pacific becomes an alternative route for big five countries in West due to relatively cheaper tuition fees and life expenses at the universities in this region and countries (Kell and Vogl, 2012, p. 2).

Asia-Pacific’s internationalization process is also attributed to qualified migration policies followed by local governments. At this point, migration, higher education, business and cultural life are involved in professional base (Neubauer, 2012, p. 13). Arguments regarding higher education, economic development and migration handled so far characterizes the Western mainstream internationalization model in Asia-Pacific. However, this does not mean that regional and local expectations and policies are neglected by the governments in Asia-Pacific. As in other sectors, higher education in this region reflects geographical, historical and cultural background. In order to support this assertion, international student mobility profiles of some specific countries can be visited.

Malaysia is one of the countries that gives importance to internationalization in higher education. Especially, International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) is famous with its international collaborations, international student profile and initiations international higher education quality. Malaysia as an education hub invests in both state and private sector to attract and recruit more international students every year. As a result of this investment, Malaysia hosts both international students and branch campuses of some of the Western countries inside its territorial border. Despite professional and global side that Malaysia adopts in higher education, we can observe regionalization and historical background in this process by shedding light on its main international student profile and branch campuses.

First of all, China, another Asia-Pacific country, is the main sending country with almost 12.000 international Chinese students to Malaysia out of 82.000 total international students in this country (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). China is followed by Indonesia, Bangladesh, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan and India by 8.440, 6.904, 5.680, 4.661, 4.649 and 2.810 students respectively (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). When considering that Malaysia can be identified an Islamic-based country, on this major profile, religion as a pull factor for international students can be revisited in addition to geographical proximity in Asia Pacific region. More than %50 of the international students in Malaysia is coming from either Islamic-based or Asia-Pacific countries (or both). This would approve cultural/religious factors and neighbouring effect in the country selection of internationally mobile students in the case of Malaysia, too.

On the other hand, Malaysia as a former British colony hosts many branch campuses of British universities. Among these universities are University of Reading, University of Southampton, University of Nottingham, Newcastle University (Education Malaysia, 2022). In addition to serve as education hub, Malaysia also seems to take the advantage of the historical relationship with the UK by hosting this country’s universities as branch campuses. This attempt can also be attributed to Malaysia’s initiations considering to be a part of Western higher education through a Western partner. We can say that sending academics and students to the UK or hosting British students and academics in branch campuses upon the agreements between both sides not only represents historical and cultural ties for Malaysia but also refers to Malaysia’s effort on being integrated into global student mobility process (Tham, 2013, p. 657).

Thailand as another country in Asia-Pacific can be examined in terms of international student profile. In Thailand, there are almost 26.000 international students and this number is majorly represented by other Asia-Pacific countries: 11.800 Chinese, 2.690 Myanmar, 1.550 Cambodian, 944 Laotian, 863 Vietnamese and 642 Nepalese students are registered at Thai universities (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). By this data, China as the major sending country in international student mobility, seems to take the top position on a neighbouring country, too. On the other hand, Thailand’s major international student profile is constructed by other Asia-Pacific countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Nepal. By this profile, it makes sense that studies on Thailand’s international student policy approves cultural proximity as one of the most important pull factor for international students (Bulmer, 2020, p. 105).

It can be concluded that international student policy and mobility also includes regionalization, historical ties and physical proximity in Asia-Pacific region like in Latin America. China as a major sending country contributes to this picture as both a regional and global actor.

## 4.3. Turkey

Being located on a geography where the Asian, European and African continents are connected by, Turkey’s internationalization process in finance, trade and education demonstrates complicated and rich aspects. In addition to economic globalization processes, Turkey’s initiations in internationalizing the education sector, specifically higher education area, in the recent decades are remarkable.

The first step taken by Turkey in international student flow coincides with the disintegration period of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990’s. After Turkic countries gain their independence, Turkish government sent the delegates to these newly established countries to make some agreements and collaborations on economic and educational areas.

By the motivation of “ethnic” background, Turkey started a scholarship program known as Grand Student Project (Büyük Öğrenci Projesi) in 1992. By this project, which seems to be a local and regional international student mobility initiation, Turkish government aimed “to help meet the qualified manpower needs of the Turkic Republics and Turkish and Related Communities, to raise a Turkey-friendly young generation and to establish a permanent bridge of brotherhood and friendship with the Turkic World, to teach Turkish and to promote Turkish culture, to introduce the countries in the Turkic World. was put into practice in order to create a great umbrella by improving the relations between these countries” (Özoğlu, Gür and Coşkun, 2012, p. 58). In time, the scope of this project was expanded from Turkic countries, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, to many other countries in Caucasians, Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa. Until 2010, 32.000 international students were sponsored by Turkish government as scholarship students registered at Turkish universities (Özoğlu, Gür and Coşkun, 2012, p. 63).

By the establishment of Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), Turkish state indirectly declared a more expanded international student policy and wanted to recruit international students from the other regions that Grand Student Project had attempted to bring (Alkın, 2020, p. 119). YTB’s major initiation to attract international students from different countries was the scholarship program, known as Türkiye Scholarships. This program covers transportation, tuition fee, accommodation, insurance and monthly scholarship for selected students (Türkiye Scholarships, 2022). From the beginning of this program to 2020, over 40.000 international students were funded by YTB under Türkiye Scholarships program (Alkın, 2020, p. 133).

In addition to the initiation of state and scholarship policy, civil society organizations have been involved in international student mobility processes in Turkey. Federation of International Student Associations, known as UDEF, majorly represents the civil side of international students in Turkey. From the arrival of an international student to his/her graduation (and even after graduation and going back home country), this federation and related associations in Turkish cities serve as volunteer consultancy to the young people in education, culture and social aid (UDEF, 2022).

Although both the state and civil area focus on such a global process and are open for the students from any country and region, policy making process, implementations, international student profile and the expectations of the students in Turkey lead us to think about the regionalization, historical ties and geographical proximity in the international student mobility and existence in a country. This assertion would be supported by “major international student profile” and “discourse of the policymakers in both state and civil society”.

According to data generated by Information Management System of Turkish Higher Education Council, known as YÖK, there were 224.048 international students registered at Turkish universities in 2020-2021 academic year (YÖK, 2022). This total number is mostly filled by Turkey’s neighbouring countries and some of the countries that Turkey keeps ongoing cultural and economic relations with. On the top of the list, there are almost 30.000 Syrian international students and this country is followed by Azerbaijan (19.383), Turkmenistan (17.571), Iraq (7.608), Iran (7.154), Afghanistan (6.854), Germany (4.378), Somalia (3.764), Yemen (3.076) and Bulgaria (3.010) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). Major distribution of international students in Turkey by these specific countries gives us a chance to re-visit the importance of regionalization, historical aspects and geographical proximity in the process of internationalization of higher education. The place of Syrian students can be read as a result of millions of refugees migrated to Turkey after the conflict and war in Syria since 2011. On the other hand, the place of Azerbaijani and Turkmen students can be explained with ethnic background, language and geographical proximity. Iraq and Iran might show the regional effect on the country selection of international students while Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen demonstrate the ongoing regional collaboration between Turkey and these countries.

Despite the global internationalization initiations followed by YÖK and YTB, distribution of countries sending their students to Turkey approves the regionalization in higher education. In addition to numbers and countries, Turkey also appreciates recruiting students from the geographies where it had or have been keeping historical ties. In his doctoral thesis based on a qualitative research maintained with policy makers of international student process in Turkey, Alkın (2020, p. 298) emphasizes this appreciation and approach to international students and their countries by both the state and civil society as follows:

*“The facts/perceptions of history and geography gain dominance in the evaluations that shape the international student policy of the state and civil sphere in Turkey. Turkey, with the patronage position it imposes on itself, puts the process of representation, ownership and sending to its country towards international students at the base of its policy (...) In other words, the transcendence channelled to “oppressed geographies” results in donorship as a result of the perception of patronage, and this donation is the neo-Norm of the Global North. It follows a course that is the exact opposite of liberal donor policies”.*

It can be concluded that mutual actions and their reflections between Turkey and the countries that constitute its major international student profile strongly approves the regionalization of international higher education and the importance of geographical, historical and cultural/religious factors as push and pull factors.

## 5. Conclusion

Globalization and internationalization of higher education has long been discussed within the social sciences. The starting point of this issue is about the dominance of Western ideals, practices and policies spread all over the globe. The US and some of the Western European countries, according to this view, determines the “terms and conditions” of global student mobility. In addition, this perspective emphasizes push and pull factors that lead a student to study abroad within the frame of “from the East to West”. “Global marketplace” of the mobile students is generally perceived inside Western.

Although such a perspective could partly explain the internationalization and international student policies of too many countries around the world, recent developments in global world and new actors in the process of internationalization let us to consider new paradigms in this area. This paper, in this respect, was an attempt to highlight and remind alternative readings on international student mobility other than mainstream global flow discourse from the East to the West. In order to support this manner, regionalization, historical ties between countries and geographical proximity have been handled in specific to Latin America, Asia-Pacific and Turkey. In this investigation, subjected country and regions were searched in terms of their international student profiles and the discourse, attempts and policies. Each case approved that international student mobility cannot be restricted to global standards determined by Western countries and educational institutions. There is also regional side behind push and pull factors encourage students to get tertiary-level education abroad.

To compare three regions/countries, some of the unique and similar perspectives can be observed. Similarity, for the first attempt, can be set up by highlighting the effect of historical and geographical background of each region/country. In addition, international student profiles of these regions/countries support the general position of this article, which is highly related to the background mentioned above. On the other hand, when Latin America displays new initiations in international student mobility through professionalization and standardization, Asia Pacific seems to take the advantage of Western-oriented internationalization. Turkey, at this point, demonstrates more unique way in this process by referring political and cultural closeness with the countries where the students intensively coming from (to Turkey). All in all, history, culture and geography stands as the most powerful pull factors for these selected sample in this article despite global background of international student mobility.

It is foreseen that international student mobility will continue in global world and this would lead us to consider new actors, geographies and understandings that shape the global student mobility by regional consideration. This paper was an attempt to catch a current phenomenon regarding the subjected area.

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