**Michelle Claville:**

Greetings everyone. My name is Michelle Claville and I serve as the vice president for research and policy analysis at the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, otherwise known as CHEA in Washington, DC here in the United States of America. I also serve as liaison to CHEA's International Quality Group, otherwise known as CIQG. With CIQG's focus on enhancing quality assurance efforts in postsecondary education institutions across the globe, it stands to reason that our collaborative discourse would engage like-minded organizations and individuals. Accordingly, the relaunch of CIQG's Quality International Newsletter is poised to showcase the work of those colleagues and organizations. Today, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Olgun Cicek. Olgun has over 29 years of experience in higher education. He is regarded as an international expert in the areas of accreditation, quality assurance, internationalization of higher education, and policy and development.

**Michelle Claville:**

Olgun lends his expertise to several quality assurance and accreditation agencies across the globe. For instance, he is the current vice president to the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. This is located in Germany. He's also an executive board member to the Association of Quality Assurance Agencies of the Islamic world in Indonesia. Furthermore, he has served in the capacity of an international expert, reviewer, or an evaluator, on the behalf of more than 30 quality assurance agencies across the globe, including the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges right here in the United States, as well as the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation in the Netherlands. Please welcome Dr. Cicek.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Thank you. Thank you, Michelle. I'm honored. Thanks for having me.

**Michelle Claville:**

So, let me just jump into our interview. Could you tell us, personally what led you to become involved with quality assurance and accreditation?

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Thank you very much. As I said, it's really an honor to be with you and to, to be in an interview with CHEA and I'm very much affiliated and, and fan of CHEA and the international quality group. So it's really good to be connected again with our colleagues. Yes, it has been almost 30 years, Michelle, that I'm in the higher education area. And I really love it very much. I think it's like a passion for me. So when I was teaching and doing other academic engagements, like we all do, at some stage, it was I think my fifth or sixth years in 1997, that I was introduced with ISO 9002 standards. And in, our, it was at that time, the graduate school, I was the vice assistant director and we decided to get this certification and go for it.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

So it was, in a way, my first introduction. Then in 2001 or 2002, in another university, I was introduced with the program accreditation of hospitals and tourism from the World Tourism Organization has a Ted Qual. So that was my second real, I should say, accreditation, on the other side of the table. So we went through the review and reports and everything was, and then we got that accreditation. So I realize that I'm very much keen on these kind of activities. And I like the standards. I like to be neat, organized - the procedures and the evidence and the timelines, deadlines, you name it. So, the performance, evaluations, motivations. And from A-Z, I realized it's really serious, my personality and my professional academic life. And once we got this achievement, so I was very happy and afterwards I was keen on accreditation at regional and international level. So the journey started from there and up, up to now, I'm, I'm really affiliated with all around the globe. So, it's really an honor and I'm very happy that I also affiliated, one way or another, with U.S. organizations when I was in the U.S. And I have the pleasure to compare and combine the European, Asian, as well as the American standards in terms of quality and accreditation. It gives me really a wide perspective and more depth in this field.

**Michelle Claville:**

Yes. Thank you so much for telling us that. And, out of curiosity, where are you currently?

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Oh, I'm in North Cyprus.

**Michelle Claville:**

Oh, you're in North Cypress.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Beautiful island.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Yeah.

**Michelle Claville:**

Yeah, Beautiful.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Exactly.

**Michelle Claville:**

We're truly honored that technology has allowed us to interact in this way.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Absolutely. Fabulous isn't it?

**Michelle Claville:**

It is. So could you tell us a little bit more about your journey? 'Cause I see that you are the vice president of, I believe it's pronounced CEENQA, is that correct?

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

CEENQA. Exactly.

**Michelle Claville:**

CEENQA. Okay, which is the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. Could you tell us about how you ended up there and a little bit about your work there?

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Sure. Thank you. Yeah. I'm, I'm currently also engaged with the quality assurance agency, YODAK, which is also member of CHEA, as well. And we, we are also member of CEENQA. So through these conferences and interactions of these associations, as a member I was attending and communicating, taking role in committees and so forth. Then after a few review with some agencies in Europe, I found myself that, yes, I'm more involved in, in the associations like CEENQA. So, one of doing one of the assembly, there was an availability for a position to be nominated on the board. And I was lucky that my agency nominated me, thanks to the management at that time. And after the election, I was privileged to be elected as a board member of CEENQA. So this is usually for two years. And when I engage with CEENQA, we work with all European colleagues and we were really close with ENQA as well.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

So it's like a big sister, big brother for us. So European higher education area. So we always see them as a mentor and try to get their support. And that was really a good experience to combine all the European qualitations and accreditation processes, ESG guidelines and so forth. So after two years of active works in CEENQA and a good network with my colleagues from different agencies and member agencies, and, our vice president was stepped down. And after two years, I was luckily nominated my, my president and my colleagues from the board, for this position. And again, I was elected by the members as a vice president last year, and I'm really honored. And I like to support the agencies with this member services that we provide through CEENQA and the good network that we try to combine. In CEENQA, we do lots of works for benefit of our members.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Like, we have a staff exchange scheme, which works perfectly the last couple of years. We, unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we have to carry out online, but still, it works and there are some positive outcomes. Usually we - people visit each other and, and get experience of their practices for a week or so. And I did myself as well, one in Slovenia. It was really a wonderful experience for me. So we have bimonthly meetings for our members, which they represent their agencies, their activities. We exchange good practices. We choose a specific topic and discuss - go deep dive on that particular hot topic - hard issues, during that time, whatever it was. So these kind of activities really, made CEENQA more visible and connected, and we are also feel, working closely with other agents, associations as well.

**Michelle Claville:**

Beautiful. I mean, you have it's ..., you've given me a wonderful segue into my next question, because we've talked about the collaboration, for example, with ENQA and CEENQA. Right? And so, could you share your thoughts on how the organizations, specifically quality assurance organizations might work together - you know, across the globe - to advance higher education quality and quality assurance. Tell me what're your thoughts on that.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Thank you. Michelle, I think this is really very important topic. We have to think and work more on that and maybe explore more. That's fabulous because personally, myself, and also as CEENQA, we benefited a lot with this collaboration. I would say that yes, with ENQA, direct communication was very helpful because we have some members who are joined, are both member of ENQA as well, CEENQA. So we have lots of commonalities that we share in exchange and, and bring our forces together. For example, CEENQA, ex-CEENQA president is now ENQA vice president, a colleague, from Romania. And so we are really very well connected. So we know both sides and we can exchange lots of ideas and, and support each other, not only within the Europe or European higher education area, but we are trying to go beyond, for example, with APQN on the Asia side, and CHEA on the other side as well. So, these are all opportunities.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

My personal experience on view is this, Michelle. We all use a similar, structure, similar guidelines, similar mindset, similar goals, whatever you name it. I have gone through the CHEA principles and the basics in your standards. We know ESG guidelines and I've checked the APQN in Asia, CHEA principles that they apply. The bottom line is the same. So we are trying to really set some standards and based on evidences, we are trying to bring quality, advanced or, or create a quality culture at the end of the day. So therefore, we have a lot to combine and to learn from each other. And if we get these experiences, connected or exchanged, I'm sure it'll boost our, our, contribution and added value to our member agencies or, or higher education institutions. So, I truly believe this is like a miracle. We have to get this going. Maybe it was not that much cooperation and collaboration before the pandemic, but now I realize we are all well connected, as you said, regardless of time and space, wherever we are, we can get together from all over the globe easily and frequently. So, this opportunity is there. I believe we have to go for it and get the benefit of it.

**Michelle Claville:**

Thank you. I truly appreciate those comments. And so now that you've shared ideas, right, about how we might collaborate, and you've also addressed that there some commonality with regard to the way we are, you know, design standards and address standards. But similarly, there are some key issues that we might need to address that affect all of us, across the globe, all the agencies that you've mentioned, regardless of location and maybe cultural differences and the like. Name some key issues that you think we might address, should we collaborate together in terms of, you know, this entire quality assurance agency, community, that is.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Yeah, I think this is really important, isn't it? We have to explore, for example, training and development, that of training of experts, for example. So I have been reviewing all around the globe with different agencies. So the system, the scheme and the principles are, are almost same, but every agency has its own way of doing this, but the experts are called international. So we should have some international norms and standards that we have to really expect from them. So, it could be a, a training for expert, a common area. We can bring our forces together and learn from our best practices. Some agencies are like, two, three years old, like baby, some agencies are 20, 30 years old, highly experienced. So, they could really share and learn from each other of the practices. So that's, that's their advantage. And with the, with the technology, digitalization, now we can do it much easily and maybe less costly and quicker and so forth.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Another area that maybe we should, get our involvement is digitalization, Michelle. And I think post-pandemic is, is the way forward is the hybrid. You know, even in our evaluations our reviews, we can use, we can get the benefit of this online submission, online reviews, online site visits. These are really helpful. If it's not fully, but at least a hybrid model could work. So digitalization is another area, whether it is a software, whether it is a basic package that they have to have, or again, the training related with the IT infrastructure and its practices, could be another area. As far as standards are concerned, as I said, we have maybe 80% commonalities in our application. But the reality of the ground is different. And, and the, procedures, the policies, the regulations are different in different parts of the world.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

So maybe we could really cooperate - to try to align. I'm not saying the, that we should have a unified accreditation procedures all around the globe. This is not needed or not, neither possible, but, we have to have at least the basics. Then you could add on, as you clearly said, the cultural differences could be an added value and it could make things easier for sometimes you can find your own way and easily, and maybe more, practical and more productive in that particular, content. So these are, maybe, the way for future for our collaboration.

**Michelle Claville:**

Thank you. Thank you for that. I want to challenge you a little bit, because you've talked about some practices that, that we might share for example; but I wanna dig a little deeper and talk about maybe some challenges that may affect, higher ed and the quality of higher ed. And so, could you speak to, maybe a key issue that, that, is of concern, personal concern to you. Okay? So I, let, let me give me a minute and let me kind of craft what, where I'm going. So let's say there is a key issue that you've identified in your, your vast experience, and then we've collaborated, meaning the quality assurance community, possibly representing all the, the different boards that you have, sat on, or currently sit on and, and that, you know, have yet to experience your expertise. So now the year is 2032. So it's 10 years from now.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Oh.

**Michelle Claville:**

And we've all collaborated on that particular issue that is currently, of concern to us. What is that issue and what would it look like in 2032?

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Yeah, you've really challenged me, and this is a tough question, but yeah, let's think about it. Why not? I mean, we could, we could, we could explore something, new, maybe. I would say digitalization is the key word. I believe we are in a new era now. So, we really shifted to another world, another venue, whatever we call it. So to, post - pandemic, I, I'm referring. So during this time, now most of the agencies, as well as the higher education institutions are trying to set their ground and be ready for these challenges of the new era. And they try to overcome this through digitalization, through the IT infrastructure and new models, new methods, whatever we call it. So likewise, quality assurance agencies are also trying to adapt to these new changes through the changing their regulations, which may not be there because most of the agencies are now really, updating their policies and procedures and, requirements and the, resources, the budgets, everything is, is changed.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

So therefore, that, that's one thing. The other thing is, accreditation agencies are trying to find some creative, innovative, new models, new ways of accrediting agencies. It also includes, not only doing it by themselves, but also doing with some other agencies collaborating with them. What I mean is institutional accreditation is now combined with program accreditation in one go. So this is a new model. We have lots of different, creative, innovative, accreditation practices are there, extant or, exposed, joint accreditation. You name it. So we have to really be smart in this new models of accreditation as per the requirement of post-pandemic era. Further, I would say assessment is another challenge, especially in terms of online, evaluation.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Because of the curiosity of the security of the exams, let's say, assessments in a way, it includes was one challenge that they're trying to overcome. And it's same for accreditors that when we do a site visit online, or when we see a campus through a drone or a livestream, it really doesn't give you the same feeling or same idea that you have been there and feeling, seeing the reality, of the grounds and getting the plans, and talking to people and, and more insight. So that is another challenge. The last thing that I would like to highlight is AI, artificial intelligence. So I think maybe in, in 10 years now, we would have more artificial intelligence is engaged, integrated now in some processes, and we'll see sometimes that maybe these machines and robots are doing the, the sorry to say, but the thankless works, and then you could get things much quicker, easier, and, and maybe more accurate. So that's, that's our challenge to integrate the digitalization.

**Michelle Claville:**

Well, thank you so much. It's very, very interesting, very interesting. I am really enjoying our conversation and I want to thank you so much for sharing, sharing your thoughts, thus far. And as we wrap up, I, I'd like to invite you to make any final comments that you'd like our readership, our audience to know.

**Dr. Olgun Cicek:**

Thank you very much. I think we are on the same boat and really, it's very tough times that we are going through. Altogether, these challenges, we, we I'm sure are overcoming together; but the CHEA - especially International Quality Group - is very much, worldwide, and connected to all around the globe and has a huge experience and really impact on this area of qualitations in higher education and accreditations. So I would really recommend to all my colleagues, in respective agencies, all around the globe. We have to really get, which is easy, and we have to really share our best practices. So one once, hopefully we'll get through this tunnel and we'll have a brighter and better future altogether, and we'll enjoy, we'll come together again in the conferences we'll discuss and explore view, values and we'll achieve and benefit our members as well. Thank you very much.

**Michelle Claville:**

Olgun, thank you so much. We have truly enjoyed this time with you. Thank you so much for sharing, not only your time, but your, your wisdom and your expertise. Know that we applaud your work and we count it an honor, to have been given a glimpse into your thoughts, and, and I would dare say, the expertise that you've shared with our colleagues across the world. Let me also thank the people at CHEA/CIQG that have worked together to make sure that this interview was possible. We thank you, the Quality International News audience for spending this time with us, and we hope you enjoyed this segment and will join us again, as we release additional issues of Quality International Newsletter throughout the year. Until next time, this is Michelle Claville on behalf of CHEA/CIQG. Take care.