



UiO • **Faculty of Educational Sciences**
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Perspectives on academic freedom and institutional autonomy in a European HE context

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Factors of relevance for our interpretation of institutional autonomy and academic freedom in European higher education include:

- **Retreat of liberal democracy**
- **Significant varieties in public governance of higher education**
 - **Between Europe and other regions/nations**
 - **Within Europe**
- **Growing integration of higher education in other policy areas**
 - **Economic affairs**
 - **Foreign affairs**
 - **Technology, business, innovation policies**

Europe is looking for its position in global politics and global science

German Chancellor Angela Merkel:

“Europe must reposition itself to stand up to the challenges posed by its big global rivals..... This is indeed a time when we need to fight for our principles and fundamental values” (15 May 2019)

Relevant German policy issues:

- *Economic competitiveness*
- *Science and innovation*
- *‘Science diplomacy’*



Global trend in higher education governance: three ideal type of governance modes

1. Economy driven (competition, market places and incentives)

- HEIs are driven by market forces and are expected to contribute to economic growth and competitiveness
- Executive autonomy

2. National agenda driven (state steering and control, hierarchy)

- HEIs are controlled by public authorities and are expected to contribute to the realization of national political agendas
- Politically determined autonomy

3. Open society driven (equality, strong institutional foundations, co-determination)

- HEIs are conditionally autonomous and are expected to contribute to various scientific, social and economic goals, as well as to the further development of open, democratic societies
- Negotiated autonomy

Impacts of the three ideal types of higher education governance modes on academic freedom

Higher education governance approach	Market coordination and competition (MCC)	National political agendas (NPA)	Social institutions and open society (SIOS)
Attention for academic freedom	Neutral	Neutral / Negative	Neutral / Positive
Limitations on academic freedom	Financial / Market control	Political / Legal	Financial / Academic
Threats to academic freedom	Moderate / Considerable	Moderate / Considerable	Low / Moderate

Studying Institutional Autonomy & Academic Freedom in European Higher Education

Institutional autonomy:

- Focus on formal distribution of authority between state authorities and universities
- Concerns about political control and accountability requirements

Academic freedom:

- Focus on formal constitutional and legislative protection of academic freedom
- Lack of clarity of definition and a strong theoretical basis
- Limited empirical data

- **EUA scorecard of institutional autonomy (2017)**

Highest level	Lowest level
1. United Kingdom	25. Spain
2. Estonia	26. Croatia
3. Finland	27. Serbia
4. Denmark	28. Hungary
5. Luxembourg	29. France

- **T. Karran's measurement of academic freedom (2007)**

Highest level	Lowest level
1. Finland	19. Malta
2. Slovenia	20. Sweden
3. Czech Republic	21. Denmark
4. Hungary	22. The Netherlands
5. Spain	23. United Kingdom

Moving beyond formal interpretations of institutional autonomy and academic freedom

European higher education institutions' political and socio-economic environments are changing dramatically, and formal interpretations don't do justice to the nature and consequences of these changes

- Contributions of higher education to society not taken for granted anymore:
 - Growing relevance expectations
 - Growing distrust in science (e.g. vaccinations)
- Growing pressure on HEIs to solve grand societal challenges
- Political distrust:
 - CEU / Hungary
 - Farage (Brexit Party): proposes to ban university courses in European studies
 - Dutch political party *Forum voor Democratie* opened a “hotline indoctrination at schools and universities”
- Universities argued to be major contributor to societal divides
 - “(Higher) education the new political cleavage in Europe” (Bovens & Wille 2017)

How to move beyond our 'legalistic/political' understanding of institutional autonomy and academic freedom?

Of crucial importance:

- To get a better understanding of the academic and administrative room to manoeuvre higher education institutions have and use in practice

Key concept

- **Living autonomy:** The ways in which institutional autonomy and academic freedom are interpreted, experienced, and used internally in higher education institutions (*Maassen, Gornitzka & Fumasoli, 2017*)

How to get an insight into higher education's living autonomy?

Higher education institutions have to take the responsibility themselves for mapping, assessing, monitoring and communicating their living autonomy when it comes to:

- Experiences and interpretations of staff and students within their HEIs with respect to freedom of expression, the academic room to manoeuvre, and institutional support.
- The way in which basic institutional goals and targets are developed and implemented, and the extent to which they are known and supported by staff and students
- The development and implementation of the institution's contributions to society's 'grand challenges', welfare and economic growth through social engagement and knowledge transfer (https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/koerber-stiftung/redaktion/gulch/pdf/2019/GUC-Studie_Langfassung_The_Place_of_Universities_in_Society.pdf)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Thank you very much for your attention!

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Research Group:

Knowledge, Learning and Governance: Studies in
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