

# **Autonomy and its Challenges in a World of Global Education**

**International Association of  
University Governing Bodies**

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## **Working Session: Autonomy**

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Chairman of the Board  
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“The central task of the universities is to equip Europe’s populations – young and old – to play their part within the Knowledge Society, in which economic, social and cultural development depend primarily on the creation and dissemination of knowledge and skills.”

“The Governance of European Universities post 2010”  
European University Association, October 2007,  
Wroclav/Poland



“For universities the adaptability and flexibility required to respond to a changing society and to changing demands relies above all on increased autonomy and adequate funding.”

European University Association, October 2007,  
Wroclav/Poland



## **rhetoric or fact?**



## **autonomy in history**

The European tradition for the last 200 years has been one of strong government interference.

In the process of the enlightened absolutism and the French Revolution autonomy was curtailed.

Universities kept being dominated by government and its bureaucracy till the end of the 20th century.



**Whom do universities belong to?**



**What kind of autonomy are we talking about?  
institutional or individual?**



### **Institutional autonomy in this sense means**

self-determination of the institution  
in a range of activities  
and the main criteria would be  
academic quality,  
academic competition,  
profile building.



### **Conflict institutional – individual autonomy**

“as universities were held accountable for efficient and effective operations, so they increased personal accountabilities and curtailed the areas of personal autonomy.”

Ingrid Moses, Institutional Autonomy Revisited, 2006



### What is institutional autonomy about?

- **organisational autonomy**,  
i.e. capacity to decide on the internal structure and decision making processes in line with the specific mission/profile
- **academic autonomy**,  
i.e. the capacity to define the mission/profile
- **personal autonomy**,  
i.e. the capacity to manage the academic/administration staff and the responsibility for personal development
- **financial autonomy**,  
i.e. the availability of lump sum budgets and the capacity of raise funds together with full costs systems linked to strategic steering to ensure financial sustainability



- **autonomy in admission**
- **autonomy in tuition fees**
- **autonomy in infrastructure (buildings)**



**University of Vienna  
University Board**

**nine members**

- four elected by the senate
- four appointed by the Federal Government
- the ninth member and chair elected by the eight members



Autonomy is no end in itself, but there is a good chance that with the right people in office autonomy makes it easier to follow high quality standards.



### **Institutional autonomy needs**

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Internal discussion and elaboration of academic goals
- Strategic planning
- Accountability



„Increased autonomy does not mean absence of outside controls, quite the opposite. Indeed governments, parliaments and society at large are asking for more accountability.“

Jamil Salmi, *Autonomy from the State vs. Responsiveness to Markets*, 2007





As there are so many stakeholders in the system that as a rule an independent board will be the only support university leadership will get on their way of transformation.



**conditions and consequences:**

- What kind of autonomy are we talking about?
- Is there a tendency of conflict between institutional and individual autonomy?
- What is autonomy exactly about?
- Risks
- Role of boards



The leaders of our universities believe that their institutions are ready to meet these challenges!?