



Report from the Parallel Session on Institutional Autonomy and Governance

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The theme was introduced by Ludmila Verbitskaya and Vadim Kasevich, St. Petersburg State University.

The discussion took its departure partly from the background paper and partly from the 1988 Magna Charta Universitatum:

- The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of the societies differently organized because of geography and cultural heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and mentally independent of all political authority and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.

Autonomy as stated in the Magna Charta is central to the intellectual role of the academic community and can be defined in guiding principles for the academic community.

The discussion focused on autonomy and governance within the framework of the Bologna process. Is autonomy an appropriate concept or ambition considering the central role of higher education institutions, HEI, in present day societies? Mass education is a public responsibility resting with governments. Considering the very large investments in HEI unrestricted autonomy is not possible. It follows that HEI are accountable to society. The interdependence between society and HEIs has to be defined within a legal framework and some guiding principles, ie:

- Autonomy has to be defined within a legal framework identifying important aspects of self-regulation for HEIs.
- Higher Education Institutions are accountable to society at large, i.e. a wider constituency than the political structure.
- Higher Education Institutions have to implement a quality culture and prove that they use resources efficiently.
- Governments/Parliaments are accountable to HEI for providing the necessary means to achieve the Bologna objectives.

Trends IV identifies at the national levels legal regulations that interferes with or restricts the implementation of change and the realisation of the Bologna objectives.

Some guiding principles were identified that should be codified in the legal framework of formal legal autonomy on particular issues:

- HEI should have the academic autonomy to design and decide its curricula and programs
- HEI should have the autonomy to decide on the admission of its students
- HEI should have autonomy in the recruitment, selection, management and development of its staff
- HEI should have financial autonomy; i.e. to manage its global budget
- HEI should be empowered to design and decide its own governing structure, internal organisation and management structure.

To emphasize the relative independence from direct political influence while recognising that accountability to society at large is welcomed and honoured the group discussed an interface between the political level and the university. A Board of Trustees or a similar body was suggested.

Governance should be developed in balance with the cultural framework and carried forward within some guiding principles for HEI:

- Grant student participation
- Transparent decision-making structures
- Interaction with stake-holders

The group agreed that improved managerial skills within the university leadership are essential. The issue of an elected or an appointed rector or president has to be approached within the cultural framework of the HEI.

Further guiding principles were recommended to governments emphasising

- State regulated degree structure compatible with the Bologna goals
- Standardised credit system to improve mobility
- Financial support to students
- Safeguard student participation
- Avoid overregulation, remove legal obstacles to change and creativity
- Focus on QA, outcome

The group proposed that HEIs in a decentralised system with a high degree of self-regulation can best serve the society, stating that creative HEI contribute best to the Bologna objectives: mobility, compatibility, comparability within a transparent structure for education. However, HEI face a great challenge ahead to prove to society and governments that the removal of legal obstacles will empower HEI to be active and flexible actors taking the central role in the next phase of the Bologna process.

Trust in institutions to take charge of implementation of the Bologna process is a key to its success.