

# Being not in One's Own Will, or On the Need for Academic Autonomy<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This article is an analytical review on the question of academic freedom. The main focus of the article is on the idea of academic autonomy as an institutional mechanism which guarantees individual academic freedom. The theme of universities' autonomy is becoming increasingly prevalent in global discussions, as the role of universities is evolving. The process of internationalization of higher education, requirements for universities' efficiency, transformation of state control and funding have significant influence on the status of universities in the society. Current research shows that this new status, together with perspectives of development lead to the increasing dependency of universities on various stakeholders. These core stakeholders, influencing autonomy are the state, business, and students as customers. Growing dependency on the private interest in turn leads to the erosion of importance that society assigns to the university as an institution.

**Keywords:** academic freedom, autonomy, republicanism, dependency, university, higher education management

*Meanwhile, the difference between a university and a school is that the university lives by free science. If a university does not live by free science, it is not worthy of the title of university.*

*S. Yu. Witte. Selected Memories. M.: Publishing House Mysl, 1991. P. 51*

## 1. Political and legal framework

In 1988, European and leading Russian universities signed the University Magna Carta (hereinafter referred to as the Charter). This Charter proclaims the key principles of the existence of the academic community and their formal organization, namely the university. The first principle postulated by Magna Carta is the principle of university autonomy: "The University operates within societies with different organizations resulting from different geographical and historical conditions, and is an autonomous institution [...]. In order to meet the requirements of the modern world, in its research and teaching activities, it must have moral and scientific independence from political and economic power"<sup>2</sup>. The third principle of the Charter is to maintain academic freedom in teaching and research. Thus, the Charter

emphasizes the most important institutional dimension of academic freedom — academic freedom of a teacher is possible provided his university is autonomous.

At the global level, the link between institutional autonomy and academic autonomy is postulated in the UNESCO Recommendation of 1997, according to which the implementation of the latter is possible only if the former is available. The recommendation clarifies that "autonomy is an institutional form of academic freedom"<sup>3</sup>.

The Declaration of Principles of the International Association of Universities emphasizes that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are not privileges, but "basic and inalienable conditions" through which the university can fulfill the mission of education and research entrusted to it by society<sup>4</sup>. In turn, this mission of universities should contribute to the realization of the right to education, established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The Magna Charta Universitatum [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum> (date of access: 21.09.2021).

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13144&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) (date of access 21.09.2021).

<sup>4</sup> Policy Statements — IAU [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://iau-aiu.net/Policy-Statements> (date of access 21.09.2021).

<sup>5</sup> Declarations, conventions, agreements and other legal materials [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl\\_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml](https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml) (date of access 21.09.2021).

Researchers urge to separate individual and institutional autonomy. Individual freedom refers to the freedom of a scientist to engage in research, teaching, and production of knowledge, even unpopular, without fear of losing his job<sup>6</sup> (to understand academic freedom as individual freedom is also proposed by Federal Law 273 On Education<sup>7</sup>). Institutional autonomy refers to the right of organizations to freely decide how they optimally manage their activities.<sup>8</sup>

Our article presents an overview of the academic literature considering the institutional dimension of academic freedom in its connection with individual academic freedom. The importance of this connection is indicated not only by international recommendations and declarations, but also by the current discussion in political theory. The Republican interpretation of freedom, which has become popular in recent decades, insists that an individual can be free only when it can be said that he is not in a state of dependence, or when there is no such force that can arbitrarily dominate individuals<sup>9</sup>. In the light of the discussion on institutional autonomy, it is necessary to pay attention to the approach that is sometimes called legal republicanism. Legal republicanism allows us to take a fresh look at the key problem in the life of universities and the academic community. "A free person" as opposed to a "slave", as Quentin Skinner, a representative of this approach, notes, is primarily a status<sup>10</sup>. This theoretical perspective shows unproductive trends to consider the concept "academic autonomy" and "academic freedom" separately from each other or obscure the institutional dimension of the predominant use of the concept "academic freedom". This is because you can only be a free member of a community in a free community<sup>11</sup>. In other words, freedom as a status should be a characteristic of both the members of the community and the community itself, so that it is possible to talk meaningfully about academic freedom. Establishing this connection and keeping it on the current agenda of discussions about academic freedom, in our opinion, is a key condition for maintaining the competitiveness of universities and the production of knowledge in the interests of society. Thus, the republican theoretical framework makes it possible to fill the international regulatory prescription with practical and political significance.

## 2. Dimensions of academic autonomy

University autonomy, according to experts, consists of the degree of freedom of the university in relation to the state, society, business and students. The interests of these stakeholders are fundamentally different and affect different areas of university activity<sup>12</sup>. Experts distinguish six dimensions of institutional autonomy: management, appointment of teachers, interaction with students, finance, content of educational programs, research<sup>13</sup>. Alternative approaches distinguish types of autonomy by the nature of interaction with the state and the main stakeholders. For example, the study of H. de Boer and co-authors identify organizational, managerial, interventional and financial autonomy<sup>14</sup>.

There is an intensive process of transformation of the status of universities and their relations with key stakeholders all over the world<sup>15</sup>. Higher education is undergoing the most profound changes in countries that are joining the global educational space and reforming their educational systems in this regard. The changes are associated with the Bologna process, with the expansion of the availability of HE<sup>16</sup> and its commercialization, and with the reduction of funding for HE in some countries. In the new environment, universities and individual scientists compete for limited resources. As a result, as notes M. Henkel, academic freedom or autonomy is no longer a right conferred on a scientist, but the result of a complex agreement with actors both inside and outside the academic world<sup>17</sup>.

In Europe, the growing autonomy of universities is accompanied by the emergence of new forms of management in the spirit of the concept of New Public Management. Presumably, an autonomous and self-governing university will respond more flexibly to market demands and manage its financial and other resources more efficiently. However, the delegation of management functions by the state to the universities themselves is accompanied by the formation of a new university

<sup>6</sup> Berdahl R. Academic Freedom, Autonomy and Accountability in British Universities. *Studies in Higher Education*. 1990 Vol. 15(2). P. 172.

<sup>7</sup> FZ 273 "On Education" [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rg.ru/2012/12/30/obrazovanie-dok.html> (date of access: 09/21/2021).

<sup>8</sup> Karran T., Mallinson L. Academic Freedom and World-Class Universities: A Virtuous Circle? *Higher Education Policy*. 2019 Vol. 32(3). P. 401-404.

<sup>9</sup> Pettit Ph. *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford. New York: Oxford University Press. 1997; Skinner Q. *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1998; Skinner Q. A Third Concept of Liberty. *Proceedings of the British Academy*. 2002 Vol. 117. P. 237-268.

<sup>10</sup> Skinner Q. *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1998. P. 38-39.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.* P. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Kuzminov Ya., Yudkevich M. Academic freedom and standards of behavior. *Questions of Economics*. 2007. No. 6 (6). P. 87.

<sup>13</sup> OECD. *OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education* Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society. Vol. 1. Vol. 2. OECD Publishing. 2008. P. 83.

<sup>14</sup> De Boer H., Jongbloed B., Enders J., File J. *Progress in Higher Education Reform across Europe: Governance Reform*. 2013. Vol. 1 Executive Summary Main Report. See Berdahl R for alternative classifications. *Academic Freedom, Autonomy and Accountability in British Universities*. *Studies in Higher Education*. 1990 Vol. 15(2). P. 169-180.

<sup>15</sup> Zgaga P. *Reconsidering University Autonomy and Governance: From Academic Freedom to Institutional Autonomy*. *University Governance and Reform: Policy, Fads, and Experience in International Perspective*, ed. by Schuetze H. G., Bruneau W., Grosjean G. International and Development Education. New York: Palgrave Macmillan UP. 2012. P. 11-22.

<sup>16</sup> Schofer E., Meyer J. W. The Worldwide Expansion of Higher Education in the Twentieth Century. *American Sociological Review*. 2005 Vol. 70(6). P. 898-920.

<sup>17</sup> Henkel M. Academic Identity and Autonomy in a Changing Policy Environment. *higher education*. 2005 Vol. 49(1). P. 170-171.

management and the reorientation of the government to control performance indicators.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, paradoxically, the increasing autonomy of universities in some cases may lead to a reduction in academic freedom. This argument is sometimes used to delegitimize the binding relationship between university autonomy and academic freedom and to show that autonomy can even threaten academic freedom due to management abuses.<sup>19</sup> Such an assumption may well turn into an argument in favor of justifying the subordinate position of universities, but this idea would run counter to the global trend, and the assumption itself would unnecessarily simplify the current situation.

According to an authoritative OECD report, since the 1990s in most European countries there has been a transition from strict state control to greater institutional independence of universities.<sup>20</sup> > Universities are becoming organizations with vertically integrated structures. New universities are replacing a system with poorly connected faculties and weak central leadership. Similar transformations in the management system are taking place in Russia<sup>21</sup>, although the experience of collegial management in our country was initially more limited.

Regardless of whether the argument about limiting university autonomy and changing the principles of organization management is empirical or normative, the transformation of the management structure contradicts the Republican thesis about free life in a free community, since the latter presupposes the participation of a free member of the community in the management of this community. This "internal" dimension of university autonomy implies, in accordance with the UNESCO recommendation<sup>22</sup>, the participation of the academic community in the management of the university, including the election of governing bodies, representative bodies, including the right to criticize the work of universities, including their own.

According to observers, the external dimensions of autonomy outlined above, in the light of the transformations of recent decades, take multidirectional vectors. For example, H. de Boer<sup>23</sup> and co-authors believe that universities increase their autonomy in the sphere of decision-making on the development of their policies and priorities, and from the point of view of freedom from interference, their freedom remains seriously limited by the state, which reserves a controlling function. Determining whether the degree of autonomy of universities in a particular country is high or low risks remains a debatable issue. However, indices and ratings of academic freedom can be a good approximation of autonomy (first of all, the project of the European University Association deserves attention<sup>24</sup>) or ratings of erosion of university autonomy (see an interesting example of a rating compiled on the basis of data on legal instruments for the protection of academic autonomy<sup>25</sup>).

### 3. The State as a stakeholder

In many countries, the existence of higher education depends on state funding, therefore, relations with the state will determine a large share of the external dimension of academic autonomy. However, the external dimension of autonomy associated with the state is undergoing important changes. T. Christensen argues that the growth of formal autonomy of universities leads to the loss of real autonomy. This is due to the growing demands on the effectiveness and accountability of universities accompanying autonomy.<sup>26</sup> N. Macerdis and A. Paulson, based on an analysis of 350 papers on the evolution of accountability, notes that in the last two decades (from 2000 to 2018), there has been a process that they unappreciatively define as "accountabilization".<sup>27</sup> This process is gaining momentum under the influence of the internationalization of higher education and the growth of its mass character, i.e. its orientation to the market. The greatest changes were concepts such as: "efficiency", "market focus", "management", "technology" (here, for example, can refer to the electronic services) and "the quality of education". Behind each accountability parameter are the interests of stakeholders, which universities should clearly understand. It can be internal and external management, teaching staff, students, society.

T. Christensen points out that because of the reconfiguration of universities to work on preparing for regular audits and performance checks, a special relationship is formed between university management and supervising ministries, which, in turn, affects the relationship between teachers and management<sup>28</sup>. Management is forced to accept the logic of ministries, reading the nature and structure of incentives sent from the executive. Therefore, some researchers state the formation of a special managerial regime in the field of HE (L. Hancock identifies these processes as "corporatization" and

<sup>18</sup> Estermann T., Nokkala T., Steinel M. University Autonomy in Europe. 2011. Brussels : European University Association.

<sup>19</sup> Nikolsky V. University autonomy and academic freedom. Higher education in Russia. 2008. No.6. C. 154.

<sup>20</sup> OECD. OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society. Vol. 1. Vol. 2. OECD Publishing. 2008. P.91.

<sup>21</sup> Kuzminov Ya., Yudkevich M. Academic freedom and standards of behavior. Questions of Economics. 2007. No.6 (6). P.87.

<sup>22</sup> Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URLJD=13144&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URLJD=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) (date of access 21.09.2021).

<sup>23</sup> Gornitzka A., Maassen P., de Boer H. Change in University Governance Structures in Continental Europe. Higher Education Quarterly. 2017 Vol. 71(3). P.281.

<sup>24</sup> Estermann T., Nokkala T., Steinel M. University Autonomy in Europe. 2011. Brussels : European University Association.

<sup>25</sup> Beiter K., Karran T., Appiagyei-Atua K. Measuring' the Erosion of Academic Freedom as an International Human Right: A Report on the Legal Protection of Academic Freedom in Europe. Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law. 2016. Vol. 49(3). P.597-691.

<sup>26</sup> Christensen T. University Governance Reforms: Potential Problems of More Autonomy? Higher Education. 2011 Vol. 62(4). P.504, 506.

<sup>27</sup> Macheridis N., Paulsson A. Tracing Accountability in Higher Education. Research in Education, 2021. February.

<sup>28</sup> Christensen T. University Governance Reforms: Potential Problems of More Autonomy? higher education. 2011 Vol. 62(4). P.512.

“commercialization”<sup>29</sup>). Corporatization contributes to the orientation of management, both internal and external state, on the “effectiveness” and “metrification” of the process, which, in turn, leads to the intensification of academic work. L. Sulkovsky offers a typologization of the concept of accountability and connects each of the possible options for its application with the results for the autonomy of universities. Accountability is designed to increase the legitimacy of universities in society, it can also develop the field of HE, be used for motivation, independent evaluation, and identification of best practices to promote effective forms of organizational behavior. However, in practice, reporting is more often used in the meaning of standardization and mechanization, forcing universities to act in proven, permitted ways. In this case, reporting means increasing the degree of control<sup>30</sup>.

The system of accountability and measurability is a constant source of debate both within the academic community and in society. Exploring this topic, R. Kelchen refers to the well-known performance paradox in the theory of public administration, which consists in the fact that if a certain set of indicators is measured and monitored, then over time the correlation between these indicators and overall efficiency inevitably weakens<sup>31</sup>. Institutions adapt to the need to optimize indicators according to measurable criteria at the cost of indicators that pay less attention to<sup>32</sup>. The phenomenon of “fitting” results to the necessary indicators is well known to the heirs of the command-planned economy. R. Kelchen, in a study of university reporting, concludes that university performance indicator systems should consist of a fairly wide set of indicators unrelated to each other, otherwise the growth of one indicator will lead to a sharp redistribution of resources for its implementation<sup>33</sup>.

Accountability makes universities dependent on the controlling agency, institutional autonomy is reduced, and the influence of the dominant political force in society in matters of academic autonomy is increasing. Shifting the balance of power towards the controlling side inevitably forces the management of universities to adapt to the “party line”. And this, in turn, poses a difficult dilemma for society: is it necessary for one of the main public institutions to freely search for answers to a wide range of questions, independently determining the areas of such searches, including politics, or is it necessary for universities to direct their resources only to those areas that seem preferable to the political establishment, because he represents the will of the voter? The latter can lead to corruption or the destruction of the institution of higher education itself as a source of independent and critical knowledge and is also fraught with “failures” and self-censorship in the scientific field because it follows the dominant force represented in state institutions. The counterargument is that the state can also contribute to the development of certain areas of science through special state programs<sup>34</sup>. However, the argument about development again turns into questions about the redistribution of existing resources or the allocation of new ones, and the allocation of additional resources is all about the same “party line” or research needs.

The creation of reports that allow maintaining a balance between the efficiency and transparency of university funding and their autonomy is a key issue of university management. This question concerns not only the heads of educational systems in developed countries, but also the leaders of the higher education sector in developing countries. For this study, countries with a traditionally strong role of state regulation, striving for the internationalization of higher education, are of interest. An example would be the sphere of higher education in China, where state regulation is combined with unprecedented growth rates of higher education and ambitious internationalization indicators. The state, striving to bring its universities to the international level, has a choice — to distribute funding evenly among all universities in order to raise the overall educational standard, or to single out a small group of leaders aimed at “winning places” in world rankings and redistribute resources in their favor. The Chinese government is following the second path<sup>35</sup>. Thus, Chinese scientists from leading universities, who are under the close attention of representatives of the entire field of higher education, work under double pressure — they face the task of inclusion in the international research agenda and at the same time promoting Chinese “unique” values on the world stage. These two contradictory tasks force scientists to carefully balance along the ideological framework, risking, on the one hand, to be ideologically incorrect, and on the other — to be unrecognized in international science<sup>36</sup>. Thus, the interference of state ideology in science leads to a reduction in research opportunities, primarily in the humanities and social sciences<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Hancock L. Commercialization and Corporatization: Academic Freedom and Autonomy under Constraints in Australian Universities. *Academic Freedom Under Siege: Higher Education in East Asia, the U. P. and Australia*, ed. by Zhidong Hao and Peter Zabielskis. 2020. P.219-246.

<sup>30</sup> Sulkowski L. Accountability of University: Transition of Public Higher Education. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, Center for Strategic and International Entrepreneurship at the Cracow University of Economics. 2016. Vol. 4(1). P.9-21.

<sup>31</sup> Kelchen R. *Higher Education Accountability*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2018. P. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Dougherty K.J., Natow R.P. Performance-Based Funding for Higher Education: How Well Does Neoliberal Theory Capture Neoliberal Practice? *Higher Education*. 2020 Vol. 80. P.467-470.

<sup>33</sup> Kelchen R. *Higher Education Accountability*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2018. P. 12, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Nikolsky V. University Autonomy and Academic Freedom. *Higher Education in Russia*. 2008. No.6. C. 147-155.

<sup>35</sup> Xuesong G., Yongyan Z. Heavy mountains' for Chinese Humanities and Social Science Academics in the Quest for World-Class Universities. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. 2020 No.50:4. P.554-572.

<sup>36</sup> Bodenhorn T. Management and “Administerization” in China’s Higher Education System: A View from the Trenches. *The China Quarterly*. 2020 No.244. P.975; Li J. Autonomy, Governance and the Chinese University 3.0: A Zhong-Yong Model from Comparative, Cultural and Contemporary Perspectives. *The China Quarterly*. 2020 No.244. P. 1003.

<sup>37</sup> Xuesong G., Yongyan Z. Heavy Mountains' for Chinese Humanities and Social Science Academics in the Quest for World-Class Universities. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. 2020 No.50:4. P.560.

Turkey is an important example of a country with a historically strong role of the state in the military. According to B. Findikli<sup>38</sup>, in Turkish universities academic freedom is understood as the personal freedom of teachers in isolation from institutional autonomy. The rector of a Turkish university is a person accountable to the president, and political loyalty becomes an important factor when choosing leaders. Appointed rectors reproduce the pattern of loyalty in their universities during the construction of the management chain, which leads to the inability of universities to make independent decisions and resist outside influence, and the vector of university policy is determined by the interests of persons in key government positions<sup>39</sup>.

In Russia, the state is also a key stakeholder, regulator, and controller of the life of universities. The development and survival of universities depends on its policy. For example, the mechanisms used by the state to evaluate universities may well lead to a reduction in their number<sup>40</sup>, which, of course, makes one doubt the possibility of institutional autonomy as such. Those researchers who perceive the changes taking place in the HE as an imposition of international norms are also skeptical about the state regulation of the HE spheres<sup>41</sup>.

D. Endovitsky and co-authors conducted an important qualitative study of how state regulation and relations with other stakeholders are perceived by rectors of Russian universities. The study reveals a negative perception of the experience of interaction between universities and government and business, in which both impose their interests and "business models"<sup>42</sup> on the university. Interviews with university leaders show that the rector's community perceives such interaction as "senseless guardianship". The study participants talk about a lack of trust, which is expressed in the growth of document flow with regional ministries of education, which hinders the development of autonomy. And if we look at such relations through the prism of the republican understanding of freedom, then such supervision or "guardianship" by the state may well become a self-limiting factor for both management and teachers in discussing issues sensitive to the dominant political force<sup>43</sup>.

The degree of accountability of universities to the state makes us think about the need for institutions that could neutralize, as far as possible, the political influence of the dominant force on the management of universities to prevent the launch of self-restraint mechanisms that reduce the value of the university itself.

## 4. Business as a stakeholder

Presumably, the diversification of university funding sources leads to increased autonomy and independence, competition in research, the creation of startups and investments in new technologies<sup>44</sup>. The model in which the autonomy of universities is supported by reducing the role of the state in financing is supported both by the market (business stakeholders see new investment opportunities in this process) and by prestigious universities (for example, the Russell Group — a group of the largest universities in the UK), which have been successfully implementing these practices for a long time<sup>45</sup>.

On the other hand, the absolute financial autonomy of universities and freedom from state interference without considering the social function of higher education can lead to dangerous consequences. Left alone with the free market, universities may lose the levers of control over the situation, which will lead to their instability and inability to make long-term decisions<sup>46</sup>. L. Hancock cites the example of Australian higher education, where the situation is complicated by the reduction of government funding and the emergence of the income factor from tuition fees for foreign students. The amount of these revenues reaches the third position in Australian exports from time to time. Competing for income from external sources, universities adopt the logic of commercial companies and redirect funds to more profitable research areas, because of which they often lose out to socio-humanitarian areas<sup>47</sup>. In addition, these areas are also under political pressure, since foreign students coming mainly from Asian countries may not like the way the socio-economic situation in their countries is covered in the disciplines taught. A similar risk lies in the relationship with the business.

<sup>38</sup> Findikli B.A Republic of Scholars or Scholars of the Republic? Reflections on the Predicaments of Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in Turkey. Higher Education. 2020. P.5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. P.9.

<sup>40</sup> See Guba K., Sokolov M., Tsvinskaya A. Fictitious Efficiency: What the Russian Survey of Performance of Higher Education Institutions Actually Assessed. Educational Studies Moscow. 2011 Vol. 1. P.97-125.

<sup>41</sup> Vinyo A., Baikov A. A., Kalyuzhnova E. Implementation of International Norms in Russia: The Case of Higher Education. Higher Education in Russia. No.29 (8-9). P.39-54.

<sup>42</sup> Endovitsky D.A., Bubnov Yu.A., Gaidar K.M. Autonomy of modern Russian universities (view from the rector's corps). Higher education in Russia. 2020. No.29 (11). P.25.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. P.28.

<sup>44</sup> Sporn B. Governance and Administration. International Handbook of Higher Education. part one. Altbach P., Forest J., Dordrecht : Springer. 2006. P.148.

<sup>45</sup> Sulkowski L. Accountability of University: Transition of Public Higher Education. Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review. Center for Strategic and International Entrepreneurship at the Cracow University of Economics. 2016. Vol. 4(1). P. 18.

<sup>46</sup> Simpson C., Marinov M. The Global Market Paradox of Stakeholder and Educational Values in Higher Education. (Re)Discovering University Autonomy, ed. by Turcan R. V., Reilly J. E., Bugaian L., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016. P.80-82.

<sup>47</sup> Hancock L. Commercialization and Corporatization: Academic Freedom and Autonomy under Constraints in Australian Universities. Academic Freedom under Siege: Higher Education in East Asia, the U. P. and Australia, ed. by Zhidong Hao and Peter Zabielskis. 2020. P.240.



Commercial collaborations of universities can compromise their institutional autonomy in the face of fierce competition for limited resources. Universities run the risk of becoming unexpectedly dependent on business, since research customers can influence the direction of research, claim intellectual property rights. As the practice of actively focusing on income from private donors shows, the result may be self-censorship of the academic community in relation to issues related to the activities of these donors<sup>48</sup>.

Research sponsorship raises strategic, political and ethical issues that require solutions at the institutional level. Philanthropy is also considered as one of the possible partial substitutes for state funding, but there are serious limitations here — the lack of a culture of charity and the instability of personal patronage<sup>49</sup>.

Therefore, in the matter of institutional autonomy, it is important to control both the factor of state financing and commercial logic. This control is important from the point of view of guaranteeing the interests of the most significant stakeholder — society as a whole. The model of relations between the state and universities can become, with some reservations, a counterexample<sup>50</sup>.

## 5. Students as a stakeholder (service orientation)

T. Christensen also points to another important variable in the formula of new relations, namely the service orientation of universities. Now a student in a new capacity as a recipient of services becomes a factor determining the position of the university<sup>51</sup>. A new wave of regulation is coming for such a student. Among the positive effects, J. Aberbach and T. Christensen mention the close interaction of teachers and students and the creation of a more favorable research environment. In this case, however, the situation remains different for a free public educational institution and a prestigious expensive university, in which “customers” can more actively demand the provision of quality services for their money and have more leverage<sup>52</sup>.

Students directly or indirectly influence many processes at universities. Competition for students and, consequently, for funding that comes from them or from the state for them, forces universities to engage in such non-core activities as promotion and marketing, career counseling and employment. One of the ways to distribute state funding in the field of higher education is state subsidies for each student. This approach increases competition between universities and puts the student at the forefront, since the budget of the university depends on his choice. The researchers note that in this case, universities remain autonomous. However, the struggle for the best applicants and their number can lead to a reduction in unpopular programs and research areas, which, in turn, can significantly reduce the personal academic freedom of teachers who are forced to be guided by the preferences of the customer<sup>53</sup>.

## 6. Society as a stakeholder, or Why is academic autonomy needed?

Many experts agree that the key stakeholder of universities is not even the state, but society. This is because the university is a public institution that has its own centuries—old history. Its socially significant functions consist in the production of knowledge in a wide range of industries, independent of private interest, and contribution to economic development.

Unlike political parties, universities must produce critical knowledge for society, including about society itself, without the goal of pleasing the public. As J.J. Cole observes, “universities by their very nature should be inconvenient”<sup>54</sup>. It is the responsibility of universities to critically evaluate any orthodoxy and public consensus, provided that this is done based on evidence and methods. The concentration of talent, the production of knowledge and the contribution to economic development, direct and indirect — all this makes higher education a kind of common good<sup>55</sup>. Universities provide society with institutional mechanisms for managing progress and development. According to the hypothesis of the greatest variability of knowledge, W. Boven argues that the university as a business to produce knowledge works the better, the more variations of ideas it can generate. Academic freedom should promote the greatest possible diversity of ideas, and the task of the university and society is to protect such knowledge production from any “vetoes”<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. P.236-238.

<sup>49</sup> BadeltP. Private External Funding of Universities: Blind Alley or New Opening? Review of Managerial Science. 2020 No.14(2). P.455-457.

<sup>50</sup> Nokkala T., Bladh A. Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the Nordic Context — Similarities and Differences. Higher Education Policy. 2014. Vol. 27(1). P.1-21.

<sup>51</sup> Christensen T. University Governance Reforms: Potential Problems of More Autonomy? Higher Education. 2011 Vol. 62(4). P.503-517.

<sup>52</sup> Aberbach J.D., Christensen T. Academic Autonomy and Freedom under Pressure: Severely Limited, or Alive and Kicking? Public Organization Rev. 2018 No.18. P.502-503.

<sup>53</sup> Reilly J.E., Turcan R.V., Bugaian L. The Challenge of University Autonomy. (Re)Discovering University Autonomy, ed. by Turcan R.V., Reilly J.E., Bugaian L. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Cole J. Defending Academic Freedom and Free Inquiry. social research. 2009 Vol. 76(3). P.812; ColliniP. What Are Universities For? London; New York: Penguin UK. 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Nixon J. Higher Education and the Public Good: Imagining the University. Bloomsbury Publishing. 2010. Tilak J.B.G. Higher Education: A Public Good or a Commodity for Trade? PROSPECTP. 2008 Vol. 38(4). P.449-466.

<sup>56</sup> Bowen, W. M. Higher Education, Governance, and Academic Freedom. (Re)Discovering University Autonomy, ed. by Turcan R. V., Reilly J. E., Bugaian L. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. P.50.

The autonomous status of universities is also relevant to the overall competitiveness of national economies. The 2008 OECD report shows that universities are becoming a condition for global competition of national economies. It is assumed that the level of education of the workforce will be related to the technological efficiency and efficiency of the economy<sup>57</sup>. There is a connection between the autonomy of universities and their effectiveness, this is the conclusion reached by the authors of a study of universities in the USA and Europe included in the Shanghai ranking, based on data on patents registered by these universities. However, as the authors of the study emphasize, the relationship between autonomy and performance becomes positive only if an important condition is met, namely, the presence of competition for funding sources<sup>58</sup>. The extension of this hypothesis to the entire spectrum of what may relate to the performance of universities requires further confirmation by data. Therefore, the researchers propose to develop more comprehensive ratings of autonomy considering the interests of the main groups of stakeholders, including teachers, administration, students, government, industry and society as a whole<sup>59</sup>.

In this regard, the perception of academic autonomy by university teachers is important. For example, a study by T. Curran and L. Mallinson on the correspondence of the position of universities in the international ranking of THE suggests that a higher position of a university in the ranking, as a rule, corresponds to a higher assessment by teachers of academic freedom at such a university<sup>60</sup>. A cross-national study of teachers' perception of academic autonomy is also noteworthy, which shows that this value is not an exclusive value of the world's leading universities, but is shared in other universities and countries, regardless of their cultural and political characteristics<sup>61</sup>. This is an important objection to those who consider academic freedom a value either of bygone eras or of Western culture.

If we accept as a hypothesis the dependence of the contribution of universities to the production of knowledge on the degree of academic autonomy, and take for granted the value of this contribution to society, the next important question will be the question of whether the university has proper management. It is it that can provide the result in which society is interested. This is the "internal dimension" of academic autonomy. Therefore, mechanisms that contribute to the achievement of these goals by universities and prevent stagnation could become an important subject of public discussion.

J. Nott and A. Payne in their study of American universities show that it is the management structure that turns out to be a significant independent variable in influencing the key performance indicators of universities: more autonomous universities attract more funding from both the budget and private investors, and the publications of teachers of more autonomous universities are cited more often than publications from more regulated universities<sup>62</sup>.

## 7. Discussion

The discussion of the topic of academic freedom is one of the constants in academic life, a kind of marker of the activity of the academic community. The discussion about academic freedom and autonomy makes sense only if universities are recognized as a socially significant institution. In this case, the interest of modern societies in the production of knowledge, independent of private interest, can be protected to some extent. The Society turns out to be the only one of the stakeholders we have considered that does not have a specific representative to express public interests in the discussion on the development of universities and higher education. That is why it is important in public discussion to fix the framework principles of the work of socially significant institutions that would guarantee the autonomy of universities in the production of knowledge about the state and society.

The erosion of academic autonomy is possible when the dependence of universities on key stakeholders becomes critical for the production of independent knowledge. Research shows that universities around the world are becoming dependent on business, students and the government represented by its regulators. At the same time, there are studies indicating greater "efficiency" of universities with broader autonomy. And efficiency in research and education is primarily in the public interest. Therefore, attempts are sometimes made to formalize the assessment of university autonomy. However, attempts to create formalized scales for assessing the autonomy of universities run into objective limitations of universal criteria due to the difference in the systems of regulation and financing of universities.

Therefore, it seems to us a promising approach to measuring the subjective perception of the loss of university autonomy and the consequences of such a loss to produce knowledge in the interests of society by the representatives of the academic community themselves. This is indicated by the Republican interpretive framework we have chosen, since it allows us to link

<sup>57</sup> OECD. OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society. Vol. 1. Vol. 2. OECD Publishing. 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Aghion P., Dewatripont M., Hoxby C., Mas-Colell A., Sapir A. The Governance and Performance of Research Universities: Evidence from Europe and the U. P.NBER Working Paper Series. 2009 No.w14851. Cambridge, Mass: National Bureau of Economic.

<sup>59</sup> Choi P. Identifying Indicators of University Autonomy According to Stakeholders' Interests. Tertiary Education and Management 2019. Vol. 25(1). P. 17-29. Research.

<sup>60</sup> Karran T., Mallinson L. Academic Freedom and World-Class Universities: A Virtuous Circle? Higher Education Policy. 2019 Vol. 32(3). P. 397-417.

<sup>61</sup> Silvernail K.D., Graso M., Salvador R.O., Miller J.K. Perceived Fairness of Faculty Governance: A Study of 51 Countries. Higher Education, 2021 April.

<sup>62</sup> Knott J., Payne A.A. The Impact of State Governance Structures on Management and Performance of Public Organizations: A Study of Higher Education Institutions. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. 2004 Vol. 23(1). P. 13-30.

institutional autonomy in its external and internal dimensions with an individual's understanding of himself and his actions. The perception of academic freedom, therefore, should correlate with the formal autonomous status of an academic institution. This line of research may be promising because the academy shares the values of autonomy regardless of the political context, and productive because at the moment there are not so many similar studies, especially in the post-Soviet context.

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