

Future of Higher Education – Bologna Process Researchers' Conference, Fifth Edition (FOHE-BPRC5)

25 – 26 March 2024, Bucharest

Session 3: Building an EHEA furthering the fundamental values of higher education

1. Digitalisation v. the Values of Higher Education: Opportunities, Threats, Recommendations to the EHEA, *Petri Mäntysaari (Hanken School of Economics, Finland)*

Digital transformation has changed society. Members of the EHEA are committed to using new opportunities provided by digitalisation and innovative technologies to enhance quality education and reinforce social inclusion. In the EHEA, this means contributing to the development of a digital education ecosystem; enhancing the digital skills and competences of teachers, learners and administrators for the digital transformation; and finding joint digital approaches to recognition, quality assurance and mobility.

However, digital transformation is a two-edged sword in higher education. On one hand, it can bring a wide range of benefits and opportunities to science, members of the scientific community, institutions and stakeholders. For example, it can foster the freedom to learn and inclusion. On the other, it can also turn into a threat to the fundamental values that higher education and the EHEA are based on, such as academic freedom.

The purpose of the article is to propose ways to address the challenges of digital transformation in the light of the fundamental values of higher education. The existence of opportunities and threats has a connection to the inherent nature of digital information, the mechanisms of digital economy, management practices fostered by digital transformation, and expectations that to some extent are unrealistic. The article explores a wide range of key opportunities and threats in this light. Since expectations relating to the potential benefits of digital transformation act as a powerful driver of change in higher education, it is recommended that the EHEA should focus more on the threats. Threats should be addressed in order to avoid compromising the fundamental values of higher education.

2. A transnational policy tool: monitoring the fundamental values of higher education in the European Higher Education Area, *Liviu Matei (King's College London), Daniela Crăciun (University of Twente) and Elisaveta Potapova (Public Policy and Management Institute Vilnius)*

A new, transnational framework of reference for higher education policy emerged in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) after 2015 in response to the crisis of academic freedom on the continent. The development of this novel framework included the identification and formal adoption by all 49 member countries of a defined list of "fundamental values of higher education" (six values, including academic freedom); the development and adoption of new definitions for these values as shared EHEA definitions; the adoption of explicit commitments to protect and promote these values, as jointly defined, at the system level; a decision to develop and employ a EHEA-wide mechanism for monitoring the fundamental values of higher education. The present paper investigates the place of the monitoring mechanism as part of this larger transnational policy endeavour in the EHEA, which was meant to safeguard the fundamental values of higher education. The monitoring mechanism is characterised and analysed as a novel policy tool, of a transnational nature, in higher education policy.

3. New frameworks of reference for academic freedom: local, regional or global, *Liviu Matei and Giulia D'Aquila (King's College London)*

From 2015-2017, significant progress can be observed in Europe, probably more than in other parts of the world, in developing new and better adapted frameworks of reference for safeguarding academic freedom. This includes the adoption for the first time of a European Higher Education Area-wide common conceptual reference for academic freedom in 2020, shared at least nominally by 49 countries. The present paper proposes a new analytic framework for studying and understanding these developments. While employing this new analytical perspective, it becomes evident that similar developments regarding new conceptualisations, codification, monitoring and practice of academic freedom are happening in other parts of the world as well, and at other levels in higher education systems (i.e., institutional, national, and global). A specific question to be asked in this context is how the European developments fit with and interact with global developments and trends in this area. In particular, the paper examines the possibility and desirability of a global conceptual reference for academic freedom, one that transcends national and regional frameworks, including that of the EHEA. Answers are sought through an analytical overview of the current state of scholarship regarding the feasibility and desirability of a common global conceptual reference for academic freedom and by interrogating the results of a curated expert dialogue dedicated to this topic.

4. The Future of Fundamental Values in the Bologna Process: Russian War in Ukraine and Re-Thinking Safeguards Against Non-Democracies, *Kateryna Suprun and Jussi Kivistö (Tampere University)*

The fundamental values of the European Higher Education Area – academic freedom, academic integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education –received little attention during the first decades of the Bologna Process. Only recently, starting with the Paris Ministerial Conference in 2018, did they gain speed in the EHEA narrative. In 2020, the Bologna Follow-Up Group was mandated by the EHEA Ministers responsible for higher education to advance methodological work on operationalisation and monitoring of fundamental values. These developments have now coincided with the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, with the support of Belarus in February 2022 – all three countries being active members of the EHEA at a time.

This chapter aims to contribute to the discussion on the fundamental values in the context of the Bologna Process from two perspectives.

First, it provides an overview of the EHEA response to the Russian war in Ukraine and analyses the procedural complexities of the EHEA decision-making process. This input is supplemented by a detailed account of the disruptions incurred by the Ukrainian higher education system, as a result of Russian military attacks since 2014 till now. The depiction of academic freedom and public responsibility for and of higher education in Ukraine yields the argument for the bottom-up model of policy implementation in emergency.

Second, the chapter argues about further potential to uphold fundamental values in supra-national cooperation with non-democracies that infringe human rights and rule of law and promote populist ideologies and 'alternative facts'. It scrutinizes the concept of democratic change through engagement and attempts to uncover often unintended legitimization of authoritarian ideologies through 'soft power'. Finally, the authors suggest implications for the EHEA future work with the Bologna Process members and beyond as part of the Global Policy Dialogue.

5. Academic Freedom of Doctoral Candidates, Frameworks for doctoral education, *Pil Maria Saugmann and Hannah Schoch (European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers)*

Academic freedom is a fundamental academic value. As several recent reports highlight, academic freedom is in decline not just globally but also across Europe. These reports focus on both institutional autonomy and the academic freedom of researchers, teachers, and students. In all of these reports, students are assumed to be at the bachelor's or master's level, while researchers and teachers are holders of doctorates with permanent employment.

However, in Europe doctoral candidates and early career researchers on non-permanent positions make up the majority of researchers working in academia. They often work under precarious conditions that differ significantly from other researchers' conditions. Similarly, as established in the Salzburg principles adopted by the EUA, doctoral education is a research education and as such differs significantly from bachelor's and master's education. This means that institutions conducting academic research and developing policy reports have a significant blind spot regarding the state of academic freedom when it comes to doctoral candidates. The aim of this paper is to address this blind spot in the current European discussion on the state of academic freedom. Analysing the national, regional, and in some cases institutional frameworks of doctoral education across Europe, this paper looks at whether these frameworks take into consideration the academic freedom of doctoral candidates for 10 European countries, besides this attention is given to the situation of doctoral candidates in Ukraine. The paper concludes with a discussion of how such a framework can act to safeguard, promote, or challenge the academic freedom of doctoral candidates and a perspective towards best practices and policy recommendations.