

Recommendation 2189 (2020)¹

Threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its [Resolution 2352 \(2020\)](#) on threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe, and recalls that democratic education, particularly democratic higher education, is a prerequisite for fair, inclusive and sustainable democratic societies. Higher education must play a key role in helping to shape the post-Covid-19 world, working towards a stronger commitment to human rights, democracy, the rule of law, social justice, inclusion and equity, and must reshape itself to respect the core values of academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy and accountability, as well as societal responsibility. Higher education institutions must revitalise their function as societal actors for the public good. In this context, the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences of Democratic Culture is more pertinent than ever.
2. The Assembly welcomes the continuing commitment by the Council of Europe to the issues of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, as expressed in the Declaration of the Global Forum on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Future of Democracy held in June 2019 in Strasbourg.
3. The Assembly remains concerned, however, about the multiplication of negative measures taken in some member States which violate or undermine academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The Council of Europe must not turn a blind eye to any abuse of human rights and academic values in its member States. The States concerned should be held accountable and be asked to revoke their controversial or discriminatory legislation and reverse the measures that do not respect the values of the Organisation they belong to.
4. The Assembly is convinced that stronger action is needed on the part of the Council of Europe and its member States to address academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions. The Organisation is well positioned to provide the necessary guidance and support, in close co-operation and co-ordination with other relevant European and international institutions and organisations.
5. In light of the above, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 5.1. adhere to the use of the definition of academic freedom as adopted by the Conference of Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) on 19 November 2020;
 - 5.2. in close co-operation with the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and other relevant stakeholders, uphold the development of the EHEA framework for the enhancement of the fundamental values of higher education and, in this context, entrust the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice with:
 - 5.2.1. carrying out an empirical study on the state of affairs and the awareness of scholars, researchers, university staff and students throughout Council of Europe and EHEA member States of their academic freedom;
 - 5.2.2. drawing up an action plan on policy advice and awareness raising in order to harmonise the sometimes-contrasting policies pursued by countries and individual institutions in the name of academic freedom;

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 20 November 2020 (see [Doc. 15167](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Koloman Brenner).*



5.2.3. carrying out a study on the effectiveness of constitutional provisions and the implementation of legislative frameworks that are meant to protect academic freedom and institutional autonomy in member States, and make policy recommendations on the basis of this study;

5.2.4. assessing the need for and feasibility of a binding instrument on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.