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Governance of higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area

Addendum to the report
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media
Rapporteur: Mr Gvozden Srećko FLEGO, Croatia, Socialist Group

1. Introduction

1. During the discussion of my report on governance of higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area, in Bucharest on 29 May 2012, committee members referred to specific cases of violations of academic freedom and the independence of higher education institutions, in particular in Turkey and Ukraine. As it was not possible to formulate an additional paragraph on this matter in Bucharest before adopting the report, I agreed to pursue further research and submit an addendum to the committee. I am grateful to my colleagues for having raised concrete cases, which illustrate the importance of academic freedom and institutional independence.

2. Academic freedom within the European Higher Education Area

2. While the respect of academic freedom and the independence of higher education institutions should be necessary conditions for new States for being admitted to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the States already participating in the EHEA must also ensure respect of these universal principles.

3. In its report of September 2009 to the triennial meeting of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART), the Brussels-based organisation Education International found:[1] "professional autonomy for teachers is largely constrained through requirements of set curricula and availability and resources for textbooks and teaching material. In higher education, academic freedom is also at risk due to budgetary or political constraints, measures of force or the application of liberal criteria to higher education systems. Teachers at all levels of education are facing a casualisation crisis as trends across the globe consistently subject teachers to precarious employment in the form of fixed-term contracts, part-time employment and even self-employment in some cases. As more managerial-type mechanisms of governance work their way into higher education institutions, academics find that they have less influence on governance aspects of higher education institutions particularly in the appointment of key administrative staff with managerial functions."

4. Education International stated in paragraph 54 of this report: "in higher education, restrictions of academic freedom have become ever more severe. Across the world, academic freedom is being restricted through budgetary or political constraints, external pressure and influence, and the commercialisation of higher education systems."

5. Education International presented in November 2007 a specific report on protecting and defending academic freedom.[2] Although already five years old, the problems identified in European countries may require further critical analysis.

1. See: http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/2009_EIReporttoCEART_en.pdf.

6. In September 2011, the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies[3] protested against a decree by the Turkish Government which transferred the formerly autonomous Turkish Academy of Sciences to the Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology and gave the government the power to appoint the president of this academy.

7. The New York-based Committee of Concerned Scientists[4] protested against the detention in Turkey of several scientists on political grounds and alleged activities against the State, and called in particular for the release of Professor Mehmet Haberal, who has been in State detention since April 2009 without trial despite his poor health.[5]

8. In its 2012 Freedom in the World Report, the New York-based organisation Freedom House stated with regard to Ukraine:[6] "academic freedom has come under pressure since [President] Yanukovych took power. Education Minister Dmytro Tabachnyk has curtailed many programs designed to promote Ukrainian language and culture, and in 2010 he began a process aimed at bringing Ukrainian textbooks into line with those in Russia. Ministry budget cuts have focused heavily on schools with liberal reputations and universities in western Ukraine, while universities in the Donetsk region have gained more funding."

3. Conclusion

9. Following the discussions in the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media on 29 May 2012 and the above-mentioned reports by civil society organisations, I submit to the committee the following amendment to the draft resolution contained in the report (Doc. 12964):

– In the draft resolution, after paragraph 6, insert the following paragraph:

> *"The Assembly is also alarmed by reports about serious violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy within the European Higher Education Area, in particular in Turkey and Ukraine. It therefore calls on the ministers participating in the Bologna Process, as well as the Joint ILO/ UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART), to monitor and combat such violations."*

2. See the full report: http://download.ei-ie.org/docs/IRISDocuments/Education/Higher%20Education%20and%20Research/Higher%20Education%20Policy%20Papers/2008-00037-01-E.pdf.
3. See: http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/humanrights/PGA_044113.
4. See: http://concernedscientists.org/category/news/turkey.
5. See: http://concernedscientists.org/2011/11/petition-for-the-release-of-drs-haberal-and-hilmioglu-from-prison-in-turkey.
6. See the chapter on Ukraine: www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/ukraine-0.