

LOOKING FOR (RE)DEFINING UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

Professor PhD **Ala COTELNIC**
Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Republic Of Moldova
acotelnic@hotmail.com

Associate professor **Angela NICULITA**
State University of Moldova, Republic Of Moldova
angela_niculitsa@yahoo.com

Professor PhD **Petru TODOS**
Technical University of Moldova, Republic Of Moldova
todospetru@yahoo.fr

Associate Professor PhD **Romeo TURCAN**
Aalborg University, Denmark
rvt@business.aau.dk

Professor PhD **Larisa BUGAIAN**
Technical University of Moldova, Republic Of Moldova
lbugaian@gmail.com

Senior lecturer PhD, HR and economic planning manager **Daniela POJAR**
Alecu Russo Balti State University, Republic Of Moldova
pojardaniela1978@gmail.com

Abstract:

The article presents a comparative analysis of the institutional university autonomy of the following EU member states: Denmark, Lithuania, Romania, Scotland and Sweden. Today we are witnessing the restructuring of various society sectors - the economy, labor market, social and political systems, etc. It is a process at state – nation level, as well as regional and global levels. Education systems in most countries, at their turn, react to this process and engage in radical reform of higher education in order to achieve economic, social and political objectives of the society. In this emerging environment universities have to review their position in order to redefine and adapt their functions, forming an autonomous space for proper decision making and, thus, playing an innovative role in the socio-economic environment.

Key words: university, institutional autonomy, higher education, teaching, research, knowledge transfer.

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INTRODUCTION

This article initiates discussions on institutional autonomy of universities and introduces a modern approach to the concept of institutional university autonomy. The mission of a modern university consists in its role as an actor in a knowledge-based society, with the purpose of contributing to the welfare of both the individual, social and economic environment, generating knowledge and transferring them to students through education, research and innovations. In this context, the mission of the university towards society changes, being defined by three basic components:

- *Teaching / Learning:* forming competent human resources - Through the education process the university is designed to prepare well trained professionals with skills that give them a competitive advantage on the labor market and being perceived by employers as an added value and ultimately would contribute to society's welfare.

- *Research*: generating new knowledge - through research, development and innovation, the university produces transferable results to the business environment, taking the form of products and services with high added value.
- *Knowledge transfer*: active contributor to the development of the community - through cultural and educational intervention in the spirit of social paradigm of the future, institutional intervention - through university's involvement as an active institutional actor in society development activities, individual intervention - through direct involvement of the academic community members in the life of the society (advice, expertise, participation in the activities of consultative and decision-making bodies, etc).

Realizing the full extent and diversity of contemporary higher education, universities need more autonomy to fulfill their mission. In this sense, the challenge relates to the definition of the "autonomy" concept, its forms, educational policies' framework, the involvement of other stakeholders and identification of the best international practices on university autonomy.

It is recognized that the nature of the word "autonomy" is not absolute, it all depends on the context within which it is applied. Within higher education institutions this word is associated with the following two words - "freedom" and "independence". If a growing number of people requires higher education, where HEIs provide necessary skills and competencies of graduates and are effective in the knowledge triangle: research-teaching-transfer of knowledge, the essence of the word "autonomy" in practice is understood as academic freedom and independence, and is what works better in relation to the state and society.

Autonomy is not a new word for the academic environment. In the last decade, the value of this idea was appreciated by many European governments. In the modern society, the links between academic and business environments have become stronger and society requirements to university – more strict. This is the reason why it is necessary to have a corresponding framework where universities can carry out/their mission in the best way possible.

According to the Association of European Universities, university autonomy has four dimensions: organizational, financial, academic and human resources autonomy. **Organizational autonomy** refers to the ability to decide on university structures and their status, procedures and criteria for selecting the bodies and decision-making factors, as well as the ability to decide on the involvement of outsiders in the work of the university Board and the ability to create distinct legal bodies.

Financial autonomy provides financing means, types and amounts of funds available for financing, mechanisms for attracting and allocating funds, the ability to keep the remaining balance after funding from the budget, and the opportunity to borrow money from the financial market. It also provides the right on buildings' ownership, to decide on tuition fees and charges for the provision of other services.

Academic autonomy refers to the educational offer, educational plans and teaching methods, the ability to select admission mechanisms, decisions in various areas, objectives and research methods, and the ability to select relevant institutions for quality assessment.

Human resources autonomy manages the responsibilities on procedures for staff recruitment, remuneration and promotion.

In recent years the discussions and analyzes of university autonomy focused mainly on these four dimensions of university management. However, the above-listed dimensions do not highlight enough the understanding of the operation of modern universities and the fact of how extensive and complex their relationships with stakeholders are.

At the basis of this article lies the idea that a fuller understanding of university autonomy can be achieved only through an overall approach, defined by the term "institutional academic autonomy."

For a better understanding of the concept of institutional university autonomy and the classical dimensions of organizational, financial, academic and human resources autonomy, five interfaces that characterize the internal and external points of interaction between modern university and stakeholders will be introduced. These interfaces are: government - university; the university

management - academic staff; academic staff - students; university – business environment and university - international environment:

The government - university interface relates to state policies in higher education area; the role of central and regional state administration in issuing regulations for the governing structures of universities; government vs. administration; supporting and promoting higher education institutions; the need and role of accreditation; financing models for research and teaching activities; responsibility and public accountability, involvement in the mission of the university.

University management – academic staff interface refers to the models of leadership and management of a modern university; delimitation of competences in decision making at strategic and operational levels; organizational implications from the top down, bottom up or in parallel; stimulation and evaluation mechanisms; external appointment and promotion policies vs. internal policies; staff mobility; responsibility and public accountability.

Academic staff - students interface refers to the role of students in the administration of the university, as well as in teaching and research processes; university staff - teachers vs. academic staff - mentors; change of the concept on students; models for the admission of students (e.g. related to general state policies in higher education area); student assessment models; students' mobility; responsibility and public accountability.

University - business environment interface, refers to the role of enterprises in the administration of the university, as well as in teaching and research processes; knowledge transfer models (e.g. in the area of financing, ownership, intellectual creation, intellectual property rights) and knowledge sharing (e.g. staff exchange programs, internships for students, promoting entrepreneurship); career development and innovation; lifelong learning; responsibility and public accountability.

University - internationalization interface refers to university internationalization policies; university strategies on internationalization; mobility of lecturers and students; mechanisms and models of internationalization; accreditation related to the process of internationalization; compatibility of the internationalization with university autonomy; internationalization and university mission; responsibility and public accountability.

After defining the mission of the university and institutional university autonomy, it is equally important to discuss briefly the importance of university autonomy. The Bologna process and the acceleration of the European integration contribute to a common European university culture, characterized by a high degree of institutional university autonomy. It supports the idea that university autonomy brings various benefits to higher education sector, while it does not imply the lack of regulation. It is perceived as a factor for improving the quality of higher education, increasing sector's performances, facilitating collaboration between universities, state and business environment, thus contributing to increasing the attractiveness of educational institutions not only for local students, but for international ones as well.

Massification of higher education and the increase of costs for studies led to an increased accountability of higher education institutions to public opinion. The role and function of higher education institutions on the effectiveness and efficiency of achieving society demands regarding training of specialists are being more often discussed.

Failure to comply to these trends exclude the country from this innovative environment and can seriously damage the future competitiveness of a nation. Institutional university autonomy is not an objective in itself, but is a vital issue for the success of the academic sector. Performance levels of higher education institutions can be seriously affected by strict regulations and government control.

DIMENSION: ORGANIZATIONAL UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

In order to reliably compare higher education systems, the mode of expression and regulation of organizational university autonomy, a systemic definition of this notion is required. The current study uses as a benchmark the definition of organizational autonomy of the Lisbon Declaration of

the European University Association (2007), according to which this component of university autonomy is the ability of higher education institutions (HEIs) to decide on the organizational structure and institutional governance - in particular, the ability to establish structures and governing bodies, university leadership and reporting relationships (subordination).

To ensure clarity and comparability of the results of the study the following criteria used to describe the organizational autonomy of universities have been identified: governing bodies, executive management, university freedom to decide on the internal structure, representation of students within governing bodies, university freedom to create legal entities: non-profit and / or commercial ones.

This material derives from the research undertaken under the above-mentioned criteria, taking into account the interfaces described in the previous article.

In two of the five studied countries, namely Lithuania and Scotland, the universities have a dual governing structure, consisting of a governing Board, which includes a small number of people, and the University Senate. Universities in Sweden, Denmark and Romania have a unitary governing structure, the governing body being the Governing Council - for Sweden and Denmark, and the University Senate - for Romania.

The governing Councils of the analyzed education systems, with all specific diversities of the respective states, have similar responsibilities, being accountable for long-term strategic decisions pertaining to the development of the university, such as: decisions on the status, strategic planning, budgeting, choosing/electing the rector and vice-rectors.

In all of the analyzed systems the governing councils include external members (non-university), who/that/which form the majority of the board and usually are representatives of the real sector enterprises, practitioners from various fields, thus ensuring business environment's involvement in all activities of higher education institutions.

In the respective dual structure, existent in Lithuania and Scotland, the University Senate is responsible for academic issues, namely: curriculum, teaching and research staff promotion, awarding scientific degrees, etc.

In Romania the University Senate has the powers of the two governing bodies from the dual structure, being the governing body that makes strategic decisions on the development of the university, and manages the academic activity of the institution.

The university senates, where it exists, represents the academic community of the institution, the academic and research staff, as well as students being their elected members. In Lithuania the University Senate may include employees of other HEIs and research institutes. Unlike Romania, Lithuania and Scotland HEI's Rector is a member of the University Senate, and in Scottish universities he is also the president of the Senate.

The procedures for external members' appointment in the governing councils vary from one system to another. In Sweden external members are proposed by the university, but are appointed by the Government. Universities in Scotland and Denmark are free to designate external members in their governing bodies. In Lithuania some of the external members are selected by the HEI, others are proposed from outside, but all of them are appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Internal members of the Councils are elected by and from the academic and student communities of the respective universities. In Scotland and Sweden University rectors are members ex officio of the governing Council.

In all of the analyzed systems the whole university community is involved in the process of electing the Senate members, except the ex officio members (if there are any). Members of the Senate, except students, are elected by teachers and research staff, while students representatives are elected by a students' representative structure or the general assembly of students. The procedure for electing members of the Senate is provided in the Statute or other regulatory university acts.

The executive management. Although the university management may include several key positions in the university, this study focuses primarily on the head of the executive body who is

referred to as the Rector. Although there are some differences between the 5 analyzed systems in terms of powers of the Rector, mostly they are similar. Thus, in all of the systems the Rector is the main executive authority of the higher education institution, that provides daily management of the university.

The manner of Rector election / appointment in the studied higher education systems is different. Thus, in Denmark and Lithuania the head of the executive body is appointed by the University Governing Council on the basis of a public competition. Scottish University rectors are also appointed by the governing councils, but based on the procedure for appointing developed by these Councils. In Sweden rectors are appointed by the Government, based on the proposals received from the governing councils of HEI, submitted after consultation with the academic community. This ensures the participation of the academic community and students in this important exercise for universities.

In Romanian universities the Rector may be designated by one of two ways:

- 1) on the basis of a public competition, based on a methodology approved by the newly elected senate; or
- 2) by universal, direct and secret suffrage of all academic and research staff of the university and student representatives in the senate and faculty councils.

In Romania, Lithuania and Sweden the mandate of the rector of the higher education institution is established by law, for a period of 4, 5 and 6 years, respectively. In addition, a person can be elected only two terms consecutively in the same institution. The term of the mandate for the rectors of Danish and Scottish universities is determined by the Governing Council.

University freedom deciding on the internal structure. In Lithuania, Scotland, Sweden and Denmark the internal structure of HEIs is not regulated by any law. Universities are free to decide on their organizational structure. In Romania the situation is different in this respect. The organizational structure of the university is strictly regulated by the Law on National Education.

Representation of students in governing bodies. In all of the five examined systems students are represented in all decision-making, executive and advisory structures of the university. This is stipulated in both institutional regulations and legislative acts. Here universities in Denmark and Sweden can be mentioned, as students show a rather high degree of involvement in decision-making, teaching and research processes, as well as other activities of the university life.

University freedom to create legal entities. Universities in Lithuania, Scotland, Denmark and Romania have the right to establish legal entities, both non-profit and commercial. But there are some restrictions in Lithuania and Denmark on the activities undertaken and the use of proceeds from such entities. Universities in Sweden have no such a right.

DIMENSION: ACADEMIC UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

Academic autonomy refers to the ability of the university to make decisions on the vision, mission and academic profile, on the introduction or removal of study programs, the choice of study language, design the structure and content of the programs, and such aspects as the admission of students or quality assurance methods for programs and awards. The ability to decide on the areas, scope/field?, goals and research methods are important subcomponents of the academic autonomy (www.eua.be).

Based on this definition and multiple problems debated during the recent years within the educational system of the Republic of Moldova, there has been selected a wide range of 10 criteria that refers to the introduction and settlement of curricula, admission to studies, recognition of studies, accreditation of study programs, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), organization of the study process, employment of graduates, the task of teachers, university scientific research and doctoral studies.

Governance - university. *The Parliament and the Government* are the courts that decide to set up or liquidate higher education and research institutions, approving / setting regulations, objectives, guidelines and resource allocation domains. The Ministry of Education and Research

(under various names) is the authority responsible for the education and research within institutions offering higher education and is the body that decides on the permission of granting qualifications by these institutions.

Four types of higher education institutions are hereby found: handcraft academies and university colleges that offer professional Lycense programs (short-term higher education, for a period of 2-3 years); universities that offer bachelor's and master scientific programs (undergraduate) and PhD; university institutes specializing in arts.

The limited number of universities impresses. In Denmark, for example, there are only 8 universities to a population of 5 million. Universities are formed by law or royal act. Colleges (vocational) are more numerous and are formed at the decision of the Ministry of Education.

Undergraduate programs last for 3-4 years (180-240 ECTS) depending on the profile and the degree obtained at the end (e.g. Scotland, Romania). *The Ministry of Education determines the general requirements for college degree programs*, I cycle study programs, integrated studies and master. New college and undergraduate programs must comply with the classification approved by the Ministry of Education. New programs are initiated at the request of the economic environment or at the formation of a new scientific direction (Scotland, Denmark, Sweden). Institutions (program team) prepare the program according to those requirements, the academic Council (University Senate) approves them, then it goes through an approval procedure for temporary operation, up to the accreditation.

So, institutions are free *to decide on the introduction or liquidation of cycle I study programs*, if they meet the rules set by the Ministry.

As for the second cycle, professional and research masters lasting 60- 90-120 credits are practiced, depending on the duration and type of the first cycle. There is a single requirement - the total duration of the first two cycles should be of no more than 300 ECTS. Other requirements are formulated by each university and are made public. It is noted that college graduates may have access to master's programs (with professional license), but they have to study one more compensatory year.

The Ministry of Education offers the right (authorizes) to carry out master and doctoral programs only to institutions that carry out scientific research in the respective field. New master programs must prove their originality in the application and knowledge advancement. The name and content of programs are determined by the authorized institutions under general requirements.

New doctoral programs usually occur as the development of research programs. Institutions may grant the title of Doctor in areas where the research is undertaken and where a doctoral school has been established, either independently or in cooperation with other institutions approved by the ministerial order. The doctoral school must be accredited or provisionally authorized as determined by the Ministry of Education.

The PhD title is awarded to students who have successfully completed the program and passed the PhD thesis. The PhD Program is equivalent to 180 ECTS. The name and content of programs is determined by the institution based on general requirements.

All study programs are usually undertaken in the national language. In parallel English language programs can be created, especially at Master and PhD levels, at institution's decision, aiming to attract foreign students (extra charge) and increase mutual mobility.

The general requirements for candidates to admission are applied to all courses and programs in higher education, specific (set by the institution) and regulated by state laws. The Ministry of Education or another state body (the Council for Higher Education in Sweden, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service in Scotland) is responsible for the centralized admission on behalf of higher education institutions. Typically, the registration is done online. The student is free to choose programs and institutions according to his priorities.

The Government approves the share of admission to study programs depending on the capacity of university structures to ensure quality education. This ability can be established in the accreditation act of the program or institution. In Romania the Ministry of Education develops on

an annual basis a methodology framework and each higher education institution develops and applies its regulation on the organization of the admission to the offered study programs.

For the admission to master studies the competition is done based on the bachelor's diploma on related programs. University colleges graduates are admitted to studies only after one compensatory year is passed. The specific requirements for admission to Masters and PhD are determined by university at study program level. The Ministry of Education determines only the general admission rules. The admission to the second cycle is the responsibility of the university, which establishes its own admission methodology.

Sweden and Romania allot a number of study grants financed by the budget for university master studies for state universities. In other countries master programs are paid.

PhD admission is based on the Regulation prepared by the Committee for Research, or another similar structure, that provides grants for doctoral studies directly or through projects on a competitive basis. The admission to doctoral studies is based on a master's degree diploma or integrated studies with 240 ECTS.

Admission of foreign students is carried out by admission committees of universities. There are no quotas on the admission. The admission of foreign students to cycle I and II is largely done through mobility and students' exchange programs. The admission requirements to cycle I and II for foreign students are the same as for local students. The knowledge of English or Swedish / Danish is required. The admission requirements are set independently by each institution. The admission of foreign students is carried out by admission committees of universities.

Universities are autonomous in using different methods of vocational guidance, various measures are undertaken at university, faculty and program levels. The activities of vocational guidance, recruitment of students from the country and abroad is one of the tasks of each department / faculty for all universities in conditions of the decrease of the number of students in all European countries.

A special role in correct and objective informing of student belongs to the centralized admissions service (e.g. UCAS in the UK).

Ensuring the quality of education and scientific university research is an obligation of each higher education institution. For accreditation, the presence of a quality management structure is mandatory.

Higher education institutions have the right to offer *studies at accredited programs only*. For the external evaluation and accreditation of study programs a National Agency for Higher Education Accreditation as an independent public body is created. The methodology, external evaluation procedures of programs and quality and relevance criteria are, usually, developed by the Agency and approved by the Ministry of education or a Government's decision.

The assessment is based on several fundamental criteria: the request of studies on the respective labor market; the program is based on research and is connected to an active high quality research environment; continuous internal quality assurance of the program. The overseas subsidiaries and affiliated institutions of foreign institutions are also subject to assessment and accreditation.

The British experience is of a high interest - the methodology, procedures and evaluation criteria are very explicitly described in the UK Quality Code. Each quality criterion has detailed and explicit instructions on the normative documentation the institution must have and may be presented to the assessors. The Code presents an integrated document that meets basic requirements for all stages of a life cycle of the university training process. Universities are free to choose a foreign accreditation agency which is included in the European Register.

A National Qualifications Authority (NCA) is the statutory qualifications' awarding and accrediting body. The NCA provides qualifications recorded with various types of certificates (for secondary education), diplomas and degrees for the levels related to higher education. The qualification levels for higher education are described in terms of studies (descriptors) and in terms of credits.

National qualifications frameworks of the visited countries is compatible with the EQF, comprises eight levels of qualifications, four of which relate to higher education: professional level (5), license (6), Master (7) and PhD levels (8). An exception is the CC of Scotland, which provides 12 levels of qualifications, but certain rules for compatibility with the EQF are provided. ANC is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education / Government. ANC also coordinates the development and maintenance of the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education.

The inclusion of certificates and degrees / titles / diplomas in the NQF Register is based on an assessment of the learning outcomes that individual degrees / certificates document in report to the NQF level descriptors. Higher education institutions are required to register the information on the skills they develop through the offer of studies in the respective Register.

The descriptors for higher education qualifications (degrees), present in the NQF, are used as reference standards / criteria both at the elaboration and the assessment and accreditation of study programs. All 5 countries use the *European Credit Transfer System ECTS*. There is a small difference in Scotland.

Higher education institutions *are responsible for organizing the whole study process, design curricula and courses, as well as current and final assessment procedures*. The content of curricula must comply with the objectives and learning outcomes, as well as with competences provided in the NQF, students must possess at the end of their studies. University study programs are designed by groups of initiative, usually by research groups with high results. But the program curriculum must comply with the legal documents issued by the ministry or other subordinated entity.

For example, in the UK the design, approval and implementation of programs is carried out in accordance with the standards established by the Quality Code, developed by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of the UK, including a number of indicators of good practice on program operation and mechanisms that higher education service provider can rely upon to enhance the quality of the program put into action.

Among the general requirements to study programs specific requirements can be found on the duration (in credits) of the practice, which depends on the program. Institutional normative acts establish the organization, reporting and evaluation means of the practice.

The final assessment is an act of appreciation of competencies obtained by the student in relation to the purpose prescribed by the program, is achieved through public presentation of a project / thesis to the evaluation committee. Exceptions are only some vocational college programs. Institutional normative documents define the presentation procedures and requirements for the content of the work/paper. The development of projects in a team is widely practiced, but it has to have a personalized assessment. The Danish system has a specific feature regarding the way of external examination both at the final stage of the study program and the assessment of semester modules.

The Romanian, Danish and Scottish NQFs clearly define the correspondence between levels of Framework's qualifications, the study documents that are issued, the type of education and training programs through which qualification and reference levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) can be acquired.

The employment rate of people with higher education varies from one area to another and from one country to another. Given that the employment and career growth rate is a performance benchmark of the study program and institution at all levels, including at the national one. A lot of effort is made to facilitate this process. Program teams and departments keep records of their graduates' employment and career advancement. At the study stage the training for the hiring process is organized. Nationally, there is a good practice in Sweden, where every 12-18 months after graduation the Swedish Authority for Higher Education collects data from graduates and then publishes a report on the employment rate of graduates on fields and institutions. In Scotland there is a long tradition of relations with alumni in order to attract sponsorship and bring candidates to studies.

The Labor Code of the examined countries sets the working week for higher education staff of 35-40 hours per week. Individually, institutions establish internal methodologies for calculating

and apportioning the workload of teaching and research staff. It is noted that the core activities of universities consist of conducting research and research-based teaching. The workload of a teacher in Denmark, for example, consists of 490 teaching hours per semester, which constitutes 60% and 200 hours for scientific research (40%). For the administrative work a part of the academic task is reduced.

Education and research policy is defined and implemented by the Ministry of Education, University Research Council and the Centre for Quality Assessment.

In all of the 5 examined countries the scientific research is an indispensable part of the training process of specialists with higher education. Research is concentrated by the side of thematic departments and is funded from the state budget and projects, as well as non-budgetary research grants. Most of the visited universities non-budgetary grants together with grants from international collaboration are comparable by size to the budget ones.

The University is autonomous in creating its own *organizational structures and conducting scientific research*: centers or laboratories, design units, consulting centers, university clinics, small production units, other manufacturing and transfer of knowledge and technology entities, integrated research, study and business centers. The institutions decide themselves on the internal allocation of financial resources for research and doctoral programs.

MA students are integrated into applied research so that at cycle three they autonomously develop valuable scientific research. In Denmark, involving students in research is regarded as a fundamental principle of university education.

Out of the annual workload of the teaching staff 40% usually belong to scientific research, which is organized and accounted for within the research group. Importance is given to the results, based on which university science funding is done from the state funds. 2-3 valuable publications in the country or international journals are mandatory. The state encourages the excellence in research of the academic staff through specific financial leverages: additional funding for institutional development, mobility grants for research at other universities in the country or abroad.

Collaboration with business environment forms an important aspect of university research and is a prerequisite for institutions. This collaboration is often organized under the form of competence centers and partnership associations that are autonomous units and report directly to the university management. The organization of specialized research institutes that combine research with the academic process is practiced, as well.

The Ministry of Education grants the right to offer **PhD studies** to universities alone or together with research institutes. The right is granted based on the external evaluation. The doctorate is considered as research-based studies, lasting 3 years full time, while in engineering - 4 years.

Aspects of the organization of doctoral studies (PhD admission, the organization of PhD program, appointment of the main supervisor) are part of university autonomy. The University establishes the rules on the access to the PhD program.

Doctoral study programs are, usually, held in doctoral schools accredited or provisionally authorized with this right. Empowering the right to lead doctoral students belongs to the university department. In Romania, the quality of doctoral supervisor is given by order of the Ministry of Education.

Doctoral studies are organized doctoral schools, which can be organized: by a university, university consortium with research and development units and doctoral centers. The organization of doctoral schools is determined by a Regulation established by the Committee for Research, with detailed specific elements provided by the regulations of the institutions. The study programs from the third cycle are completed with the presentation of the PhD thesis, which done orally and publicly. The University decides on the evaluation, assessment and the presentation procedure. The Faculty / school appoints one or two opponents, and a board of examiners, as well as at least one person from another university. The Commission is the only structure empowered on making decisions on marking and awarding the PhD degree. The degree is confirmed at the University Senate.

In Lithuania, Romania and Sweden there is no a different degree than the PhD in science or arts. Scotland has set a higher doctor degree (Higher doctorates), following the PhD, and is awarded to a person for valuable research or publications. The title is offered to people from education area, based on the published work, but it does not have a distinctive position within the qualifications and is considered honorary title. In Denmark a higher degree of doctor (doktorgraden) is provided, which is similar to the degree of PhD in Moldova, but in this case the requirements are much simpler.

Post-doctorate is a thorough research program for young people with a Ph.D., to gain additional experience and qualifications.

DIMENSION: UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY ON HUMAN RESOURCES

The autonomy of human resources is one of the four pillars of university autonomy materialized in the institution's right to set its own recruitment procedures, to develop its own remuneration system based on specific performance indicators for each higher education institution (HEI) and decide on the procedures for promoting employees, etc. The autonomy of human resources, as defined in the Declaration of European Universities (2007), includes university freedom to recruit and select qualified university human resources, the responsibility for work contracting, setting of wages, salary increments depending on the value of human potential.

The freedom / ability to decide on recruitment and employment procedures. This criterion refers to HEIs' freedom to decide on recruitment and employment procedures. Broadly, universities are autonomous in achieving this freedom. Central authorities do not get involved in employment and / or recruitment procedures (less in Romania), universities enjoying a high degree of autonomy in this area.

HEI freedom to decide on the recruitment and employment procedures is correlated with the general principles of the labor law: any HEI, as much autonomy as it might have, can not establish internal regulations which would contravene to national and EU labor legislation. Exercising the freedom to decide on staff recruitment and employment procedures should not limit the rights and freedoms guaranteed to employees and employers through various legislative acts. So, the institution has the right to develop its own procedures, to set its own criteria of employment to the extent that they do not violate the rules of labor law.

In all of the analyzed universities there are specialized collegial bodies responsible for the recruitment and / or employment procedures: Commission for wages and employment in Lithuania, the Committee responsible for human resources procedures and strategies in Scotland, the Commission for employment in Sweden and Denmark and the Competition Commission in Romania.

The componse of these committees does not need the approval of a hierarchical authority, except Romania, where rector's decision on establishing the componse of the committee is submitted to the Ministry of National Education and the nominal componse of the competition commission is published on the website. In case of associate professor, professor,II degree senior researcher and I degree researcher, the commission componse shall be published in the Official Gazette of Romania.

Although normative acts regulating the activity of HEI determine the procedure for recruitment / employment, making it uniform for all institutions in the country, each institution is free to definitely decide on the optimal candidate.

HEI staff does not have the status of civil servants, except in Sweden and Denmark, they are considered employees of the public sector, but no country requires confirmation from a higher authority for the employment of the academic staff.

In all countries the employment is initially made for a specific period, thereafter if the person meets the requirements an employment contract for an indefinite period is signed, the establishment of minimum requirements for hiring didactic and scientific staff by higher education framework law of each country comes to support the idea that university autonomy of human resources should be

correlated with the principle of public accountability of the institution. The University is free to select its staff, establish its own criteria (which will not be less than those established by law), but that selection must be among the best or: the State, being aware of the role of the university within the society, establishes rules that will lead to the fact that HEIs opt to be in favor of the best performing candidates.

The freedom of institutions to decide on the promotion of employees. This criterion designates HEI right to decide on ensuring career growth of the personnel, by passing to another grade, position or higher vocational stage.

Employee assessment aims at determining promotion opportunities and remuneration criteria. The career promotion of the staff of the universities of the five countries is done according to internal evaluation procedures, with certain exceptions in Romania, where the Law on National Education regulates these procedures. The promotion to a superior function is carried out on a competitive basis, after prior verification and employees' evaluation is part of the quality management system in force in each institution.

In all five countries university autonomy of human resources is a large one, the institution is free to decide on the periodicity of the evaluation, the structures responsible for the assessment and the assessment methodology.

No external authority supervises these procedures, the institution must take care that the evaluation will be set taking into account the principle of non-discrimination and transparency.

The rights and freedoms of higher education staff. HEIs in the respective five countries have developed a number of policies on the right enforcement of staff in the institutions. These policies also provide the respect of the right to rest by providing both ordinary annual leave and additional leave as well. Institutions are autonomous in terms of providing the creation leave (sabbatical leave) while maintaining the salary, thus stimulating research activities.

The frequency of such leave varies from one country to another and from one institution to another. Usually, the leave provision method is determined by internal documents of the institutions, they enjoying a high degree of autonomy in this regard. For example, the length of the leave varies depending on the seniority that the person has within the institution, as it is a working experience of at least four years in Scotland, at Strathclyde University.

The freedom to decide on the work load lies in HEI's right to determine the distribution of the working time, the work load, to determine as accurately as possible the work tasks for a member of the academic community.

The teaching load of the academic staff in HEIs of Sweden and Denmark is made up of a total number of hours, distributed monthly throughout the academic year. According to internal regulations of the university, the academic staff's working hours must be planned within the department the employee activates, as a result of discussions held between him and the head of the department. When planning the working hours, operational requirements, the financial situation and the general analysis of the teaching tasks have to be taken into account. At the department level, the total number of hours for teaching and research will be accounted, by spreading them evenly to all department members.

In Lithuania the work load of the academic staff consists of the teaching and research activities. In Scotland the work load of the academic staff consists of teaching, research, knowledge transfer and fulfilling administrative activities. The share of a type of activity in the totality of the work load is determined by the head of department, who, by assessing the skills of each employee, will organize the activities of the department in such a way that there is a reasonable balance among all members of the department. In Romania, the work load may comprise a number of teaching and research activities.

In all five countries universities benefit from both institutional and national level autonomy. The didactic staff benefits of a reduced work regime due to the increased emotional psycho effort put into the activity. The annual amount of hours represents approximately 1000 hours, out of which approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ are meant for the direct teaching-contact activities. Institutions are

autonomous in terms of annual distribution of the working hours, this being the responsibility of departments.

The freedom / capacity of institutions to decide on the payroll system. The freedom a HEI to decide on the system of remuneration is manifested by their right to decide on the system of wages, awards, establishing various salary increases depending on the complexity and volume of the work performed by an employee.

In all of the above-mentioned countries the salary consists of a fixed part (the function salary: Lithuania, Scotland, Sweden and Denmark and the basic salary in Romania) and a variable part, which consists of various bonuses, allowances, incentive payments, etc. Each institution is required to adopt wage policies, which will contain provisions on transparency in the wage setting process.

Universities enjoy greater autonomy in relation to the right to determine the conditions of remuneration, except in Romania, where there is an express regulation in the Law of National Education regarding the size of salaries and other incentive payments.

The structures empowered to set wages are usually collegial structures, called Committees for salarization or Commissions labor remuneration. In Sweden and Denmark the employer and employee representatives negotiate criteria for establishing salary criteria for different groups of employees. Based on these criteria the subdivision director / head of department will evaluate each employee in order to establish his rightful wages. These criteria negotiated by the parties to the employment relationship of a HEI will serve as the basis for salary negotiation between the employee and the head of the department, etc. In Romania, the Senate of the institution is responsible for regulating the salary procedures, as well.

The freedom to decide on the termination of employment contracts. The employment contracts of the HEIs staff in all five countries may cease, as a rule, in connection with the expiration of employment term, or at the initiative of either party. Higher education institutions have well-developed policies and grounds for termination are regulated under general rules by the labor law.

It is not possible to report the degree of autonomy in this regard, but it is clear that institutions are autonomous in terms that the decision to terminate employment relationships do not require approval from an external higher authority.

Following the study visit it was decided to perform a cross case analysis of human resource autonomy through the light of the five interfaces mentioned in the first article, namely: government - university, university – didactic staff; faculty - students; university - business and university - internationalization.

Government - university interface. The resort ministries of these countries are bodies that develop personnel policies, which must be considered and implemented by institutions, taking into account the principle of non-discrimination. At the same time, ministries have an advisory role in the work of the institution. Less can be said about Romania, where the role of the ministry is one of the main, coordinating and monitoring all activities related to personnel.

Interface management staff - academics. Competitions on employment are open and give the possibility to participate to persons that qualify for the contest, without any discrimination, under the law, and the competition Methodology will not contain discriminatory provisions for candidates based on gender, ethnic or social origin, citizenship, religion or belief, disability, political opinion, social or economic state. The competition methodology makes no reference to seniority and contains no provisions that would disadvantage candidates from outside the institution or abroad. The position description will be made in comprehensive terms that correspond to the real needs of the higher education institution without limiting the number of potential candidates. All vacancies are announced at national and international levels (except Romania, where the vacancy is announced in the Official Gazette).

The academic staff – students interface. The process of study and research in the analyzed countries is based on the "student-centered studies" principle. The student is an active partner in promoting a positive study environment. Students are widely involved in the assessment process of

the course and teaching method quality. Students are part of the Quality Management System. All institutions have developed procedures for evaluating the academic staff, students being widely involved in their implementation.

University – business environment interface. Collaboration with business environment in all visited universities is a mandatory activity. It means that each academic structure should be involved in research and to conduct research projects. Research should be applied specifically for a company, to be useful to the organization and bring to the institution and researcher additional income.

University – internationalization interface. Internationalization is a process designed to improve the quality of training students for a globalized world. The role of the teacher in this process is increased. All institutions in five countries have developed policies on internationalization. Particular attention is given to the mobility of studies at other universities in the world, as well as receiving foreign students in the university. The mobility of academics both in terms of teaching, but especially for research, is an important criterion in evaluating the academic staff.

DIMENSION: FINANCIAL UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

Lately, lots of discussions are held on financial autonomy. Many people are asking whether financially autonomous universities will decrease or increase the fees for education and for the accommodation in hostels. What will be the impact on the quality of education? In fact, there are too many questions, and some of them don't have a reasoned answer yet.

First, it has to be clarified what does this type of autonomy represent. We used the definition introduced by Estermann and Hakki (2009), and Estermann, Hakki, and Steinel (2011) as well, by which the financial autonomy of universities is seen as the ability to: accumulate funds and to keep budget surplus funds; establish tuition fees; borrow money from the financial markets; invest in financial products; issue shares and bonds; owns lands and buildings. This means that we will analyze the financial autonomy of universities through the light of certain criteria that define this type of autonomy, but we take into account the five interfaces, which characterize the internal and external points of interaction between modern university and stakeholders, without specific reference to them.

Thus, it was found out that in all of the five surveyed countries higher education funding is made from two basic sources: public and private. There is a different percentage ratio between these sources. Funding from the state budget in the analyzed countries is based on different approaches: in Lithuania public funds are allocated based on the global grant, which is divided between different categories of expenditure. But the global grant must be spent according to the budget categories presented to the financier or supervisory body, so the university does not have the freedom to decide in which direction the respective amounts to be spent. In other countries (Scotland, Sweden, Denmark and Romania) financing is made under the form of block grant on two funding lines: teaching and research.

The funding of studies is carried out based on different criteria: in Lithuania - the number of physical students (through vouchers); in Scotland - the number of equivalent students (FTE). Their number is determined by dividing the total number of study credits accumulated by all students during the respective year to 60. Sweden considers both physical students (40%), and their performance, by FTE students (60%), as well. Denmark considers only performant and Romania - equivalent students in proportion of 70% and 30%, based on relative quality indicators.

The funding of research in all 5 countries is based on the dual system, which means that some of the expenses are covered by the state and are included in the amount of the voucher (Lithuania) or in the core funding (Scotland, Romania, Denmark), and are designed to cover some operational and maintenance costs of the infrastructure needed for research. The second part (much larger) is allocated on a competitive basis for projects by the competent authorities of each country.

Each country has its own *methodology for allocating financial resources* for universities. It's natural that some elements are common, others specific to each state. The allocation of budgetary resources in Lithuania is made based on the principle "money follows the student". The enrolment is carried out by an independent specialized agency and not by the university. The candidates opt for a particular specialty, and being admitted to study, choose the university. The money from the budget, through vouchers, go to those universities that the enrolled students chose. In Scotland and Sweden allocation is carried out, largely, based on allocations from previous years and according to the existing budget at the state level. In Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council concludes an annual memorandum with each university, setting out the respective conditions. In Sweden, a planning of funds for a period of 3 years is made, specifying the respective amount every year. Denmark has a system for allocating financial resources based on outputs. The Ministry allocates resources according to the number of FTE and cost of a student in the respective area: for teaching and basic research. Romania allocates resources to universities based on contracts signed with the Ministry of National Education. There is a methodology based on calculation formulas, that is reviewed annually.

In each of the five analyzed countries there is a historically established *methodology for calculating the cost (price) of a student's training*. In Lithuania this methodology is based on calculating the cost (price) per student, which represents the total amount of expenses related to the number of students financed from the state budget in the past. The price varies depending on the training level (bachelor, master, doctorate), the form of education (day time), and the field of study. In Scotland the basis for calculating the cost of preparing a student is the so-called TRAC methodology. The processes that form the TRAC base take into account direct and indirect costs of the organization in order to be analyzed and attached to activities in a fair and reasonable manner.

In Sweden and Denmark the calculation of the cost per student is based on a Full Costing methodology that allows consideration of all costs, both direct and indirect, incurred by the institution to train a student. After calculations are done at institution level, all costs are divided by the number of students, taking into account the field and form of study. Thus, as the basis for calculating the cost per student serves the humanitarian education cost, while at financing programs using advanced technology components a coefficient depending on the complexity is included. The student that studies on a daily basis is taken into account as well, those studying on a reduced frequency are quantified at 0.75 (Sweden). In Romania there is a methodology based on the use of certain formulas that take into account all costs incurred at university level.

Universities from the 5 countries enjoy, along with *funding from the state budget, of funding from private sources*, as well. Both the share of private sources and their structure differ from country to country. Practically, there are legal provisions to private sources that may be attracted to higher education, and means of monitoring their use. Private sources are used depending on the strategy adopted by the university. Monitoring the use of resources is carried out by internal financial audit, and by external financial audit through various control bodies specific to each country, which verifies the use of financial resources by the destination established in the university plans. So, in terms of financial university autonomy, the use of revenues from private sources is not specifically monitored.

Not all universities have *the right to borrow money on the financial market*. Thus, in Lithuania higher education institutions have the right to loan money through loans, to sign credit agreements, leasing (finance lease) within the overall lending limits established by the Law approving the financial indicators from the state and municipal budgets for the respective year. In Scotland, the university may borrow money from banks only by bringing reasons and with the consent of the Scottish Funding Council. In Sweden universities can borrow money on the financial market only from the bank specified (designated) by the responsible authority. In Denmark universities are allowed to borrow money from the financial market without restrictions. In Romania, the law allows universities to borrow money as well.

Universities in all of the five countries have the freedom in *determining the size of tuition fees*. Even in countries where there are no taxes for local students and those from the European

Union (Scotland, Sweden, Denmark) universities establish the size of fees for students from outside the European Union, as well as for another category of students, such as those from masters, etc. The requirement imposed in all these countries is that the fee considers all types of costs and is not less than the actual costs for the preparation of a student.

In the 5 countries the respective study refers to the tuition policy for local citizens and those from the European Union is the same. The university establishes the tuition fee by itself for students coming from countries outside the European Union. Usually, it's bigger than the tuition for the domestic ones and than the actual training costs. In Romania, university senates can determine the final size of the fees for foreigners, but not less than the amount set by the Government Order.

The situation regarding *cash balances at the end of the year* in these countries is of a high interest. In Lithuania and Scotland the money left at the end of the year, from the state budget must be reimbursed to the State. The balance of own resources is kept by the university and can be transferred to the next year. In Swedish, Danish and Romanian universities the unused funds, regardless of their sourcing, remain at the university and can be reported from year to year.

When referring to *the right to be own a property* we find out that the situation in this respect is different as well. Thus the universities from Lithuania, Romania and Denmark can be owners of buildings purchased from its own sources. The ones purchased from public funds belong to the state. In Sweden, universities do not have the ownership of buildings. They are renting space from a state agency that manages these buildings. In Scotland universities only manage the property.

All of the surveyed countries have *certain ways of supporting the students*. Performance and social scholarships are granted to students by universities in Lithuania and Romania. In Lithuania students can obtain state-supported loans to cover their study costs, living expenses, partial studies according to international agreements. In Scotland scholarships are granted by an independent agency. In Scotland, Sweden and Denmark students receive grants and loans under certain conditions. Thus, in Denmark and Scotland loans should be repaid during 15 years after graduation, while in Sweden - during 25 years as reimbursement only after reaching a certain level of income.

There is no homogeneous *distribution of resources within the university*. Thus, in Lithuania the distribution of resources is undertaken centrally by the administration, while in other countries (Scotland, Sweden, Denmark and Romania) - in a decentralized manner. Many universities apply the funding principle within the internal allocation of funds identical to that at the country level.

CONCLUSIONS

Although universities of the almost all of the analyzed systems have internal regulations, which provide a framework for their organizational autonomy, the number and level of detail of these rules differ a lot. In most cases, national legislation contains only guidelines on setting the decision-making body (bodies), their structure and representative groups the members of which are selected of.

In most of the studied countries universities are relatively free to decide on their administrative structures. This is also true for their ability to decide, within the legal framework, on the academic structures and the creation of legal entities. Through such entities institutions may carry some additional activities, both non-profit and commercial.

The inclusion of external members is an important element in preparing competitive specialists on the labor market, efficient cooperation of the scientific environment with the business environment, as well as increasing the accountability of autonomous universities to stakeholders and society as a whole.

In most of the analyzed systems institution's governing bodies include external members who are either selected by universities themselves or are nominated by an external authority, based on the opinions provided by universities.

The head of the executive body of the university is always selected / elected by the institution and is responsible to the governing body of the university. In some of the studied systems the head of the executive body is selected or elected, appointed / confirmed by a higher authority.

With regard to the executive management, in most of the analyzed countries the transition to a "managerial" type of leadership seems to contribute to greater autonomy in the management of universities and their internal structure determination.

Analyzing the legislation of the 5 European countries with respect to their Higher Education systems and internal norms we observed homogeneity in treating the most important issues in the academic and research areas. This, in our view, is the result of the implementation of the basic lines of the Bologna process, which aims at harmonizing the education systems. Higher education institutions in EU countries have a well-defined academic autonomy, and concrete obligations and responsibilities towards society and central administrative authorities as well.

The central administration determines the policies and development strategies of education, and is responsible for assessing the achievement of these strategies. Institutions are autonomous in choosing tools and mechanisms to achieve the educational and research process and are fully responsible for the quality of the final results.

There is no perfect model of human resource autonomy, but there are good practices of certain universities with traditions, which, once taken and adjusted to socio-economic realities of our country could bring positive results, strengthen institutional capacities of higher education and would increase autonomy of the existing human resources management, correlating it with the principle of public accountability of each institution or: university autonomy means, besides freedom, a high level of responsibility as well.

The respective study demonstrated that the financial autonomy of universities is characteristic for all of the above-mentioned states. There's still a difference in the degrees of freedom they have in solving certain problems. It is to be noted that it's impossible to highlight an ideal model, perfect for use in any country. Every time it has to start from specific features, traditions and the historical evolution of universities. In the same time, the high degree of responsibility universities have at using the financial resources was very much stressed.

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