

**GLOBAL FORUM ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM, INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY  
AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY  
Council of Europe, 20 & 21 June 2019**

Co-organized by the Council of Europe, the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, the Organization of American States, the Magna Charta Observatory, and the International Association of Universities

### **Summary**

The Global Forum comprised a series of plenary sessions on various dimensions and perspectives on Academic Freedom (AF) and Institutional Autonomy (IA). Parallel group sessions on the first day allowed for more interactive discussions on the contents covered in the plenary sessions. A conference declaration was discussed throughout the two days and adopted at the end of the meeting.

### **Agenda Points**

- Perspectives on AF & IA in different countries and continents
- AF & IA from the vantage point of public authorities
- AF & IA: Examples and Challenges
- Conference Statement on AF & IA

### **Key Issues & Take-Aways**

- **Fundamental Values:** Fundamental values are increasingly under threat, also within Europe. The definition of AF (and lack thereof) emerged as a key issue. Only if AF (and IA) are conceptualized and defined, can the concepts be operationalized and measured, and a monitor system put in place. Fundamental values will find continuous support from the BFUG.
- **Lack of awareness of AF and IA:** An international survey conducted by *Terrence Karran (University of Lincoln)* indicates a lack of knowledge about AF among members of the academic community. Moreover, there is a need to more strongly and explicitly emphasize that students are part of the academic community, and not mere consumers of HE, and thus also affected by AF and IA.
- **Role of Technology:** Recent technological developments are a game-changer for democracy. While e.g. social media seemingly facilitate participation in democratic processes, there are fake-news, deep-fake, hate-speech, etc. There was a call for more attention on these dynamics and for reflecting on the role for HE in these contexts of new technologies and related societal phenomena.
- **Role of Public Authorities:** PA in democratic societies have a stake in universities educating people with civic competences. PA have to strike a balance between support and interference; this also relates to quality assurance. Moreover, PA should ensure that academics can fulfill their role without being too much driven by other agendas, such as securing funding.
- **Inclusion of non-democratic societies:** It was discussed whether non-democratic societies should also be included and/or addressed in the drafted declaration. Generally, there was agreement that democracy and education (as well as democracy and AF and IA) are strongly intertwined. As of now, the declaration explicitly refers to democratic societies.
- **Secure employment of academics:** Secure employment conditions for academics (e.g. tenure) were discussed as a pre-requisite for AF and IA. This was the most controversial issue with regards to the declaration; several attendees felt that including the issue of tenure and secure employment in the declaration risked making the scope of the declaration broader and thus weaker. Finally, the aspect of secure employment was adopted in the declaration.