

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002528/22**  
**to the Commission**  
**Alexis Georgoulis (The Left)**  
(11 July 2022)

**Subject:** On the protection of academic freedom and the autonomy of universities' governance

Europe has a long tradition regarding the governance of universities, which enjoy autonomy in governance. Autonomy in the governance of universities is crucial, as it ensures academic freedom, as well as decision-making by those who have scientific expertise in matters of research and curricula.

However, worrying phenomena have been observed in the Union lately. For example, in Hungary, university departments of gender studies have been abolished by the central government <sup>(1)</sup>, obviously with no scientific reasoning involved, since gender studies are flourishing everywhere and research is produced in this domain.

Another example is the new bill on tertiary education prepared by the Greek Ministry of Education. It provides that the ministry can decide on the abolition of any department without the university's consent. Other articles of the bill also transfer decision-making on specific issues to the ministry, and alter the existing democratic election of the universities' leadership. The Hellenic Federation of University Teachers' Associations rejected the bill unanimously and several Greek universities, as well as 740 distinguished academics and researchers from 50 countries have expressed their disagreement <sup>(2)</sup>, as have 1 000 academics and distinguished Greeks <sup>(3)</sup>.

1. What does the Commission plan to do in order to ensure academic freedom, which is directly linked to freedom of expression?
2. Will it consider including universities' democratic and autonomous governance in the funding conditions of European programmes?

**Answer given by Ms Gabriel on behalf of the European Commission**  
(4 October 2022)

The Commission supports the autonomy of academic institutions within the limits of the division of competences between the EU and its Member States. Member States are fully responsible for the content and organisation of their education systems.

Academic freedom is enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights <sup>(4)</sup>. However, the provisions of the Charter are binding on the Member States only when they are implementing EC law. The Charter complements national systems but does not replace them.

Promoting academic freedom is at the core of policies developed at EU level. It is one of the key commitments in the context of the Bologna Process, where the Commission is a full member.

The Ministerial Conference Rome Communiqué (2020) <sup>(5)</sup> reaffirms the commitment to promoting and protecting shared fundamental values. A Bologna working group on fundamental values <sup>(6)</sup> is working towards a framework that will monitor the respect of fundamental values in the EU.

The European Research Area's Bonn Declaration <sup>(7)</sup> is also central in this respect. In the European strategy for universities <sup>(8)</sup>, the Commission announces that it will develop guiding principles on protecting fundamental academic values in the EU.

As for the European funding programmes, activities under the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes should respect fundamental values and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Erasmus+ programme encourages the participation of young people in democratic life.

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<sup>(1)</sup> <https://theconversation.com/gender-studies-banned-at-university-the-hungarian-governments-latest-attack-on-equality-103150>

<sup>(2)</sup> [https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/383909\\_neo-diethnes-rapisma-kerameos-sebasteite-ta-ellinika-aei-zitoy-n-740-dianoymenoi](https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/383909_neo-diethnes-rapisma-kerameos-sebasteite-ta-ellinika-aei-zitoy-n-740-dianoymenoi)  
[https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/383661\\_aei-apanota-adeiasmata-kerameos-apo-sygklytoys-gia-nomo-plaisio](https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/383661_aei-apanota-adeiasmata-kerameos-apo-sygklytoys-gia-nomo-plaisio)

<sup>(3)</sup> <https://m.naftemporiki.gr/story/1874474/paideia-epistol-i-katapeltis-stin-kerameos-apo-1000-panepistimiakous-gia-to-neo-nsx>

<sup>(4)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights_en)

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://eha.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique.pdf](http://eha.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf)

<sup>(6)</sup> <http://eha.info/page-Working-Group-FV>

<sup>(7)</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/\\_drp-efr-bonner\\_erklaerung\\_en\\_with-signatures\\_maerz\\_2021.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/_drp-efr-bonner_erklaerung_en_with-signatures_maerz_2021.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1)

<sup>(8)</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/communication-european-strategy-for-universities-graphic-version.pdf>