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CHAPTER 16

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The idea for this book has arisen out of a major in-depth review of university autonomy in Moldova funded by the European Commission (EC) (www.euniam.aau. dk). Classically, university autonomy has been understood to relate to four pillars: organizational autonomy, financial autonomy, human resource autonomy, and academic autonomy, and studies, research models, and political statements on university autonomy have focused on understanding and measuring autonomy under each of these headings.

The Moldova project (EUniAM 2015), while appreciating the central role of these four dimensions of university autonomy recognized that exploring each of them independently tends to obscure the complexity of the topic and their interdependence. Moreover it disguises the fact that not only do these four elements interact in a complex way, but there are a range of other forces that shape, determine, and influence the form and implementation of autonomy.

Therefore, a holistic view (see figure 1.1) has been developed to gain a fuller understanding of university autonomy. This holistic view, which we call institutional university autonomy, brings together the traditional four pillars—organization, finance, human resource, and academic—and five interfaces:

- government-university
- university management-university staff
- academic staff-students
- university-business
- university-internationalization

Each of these interfaces that characterize external and internal points of interaction between modern universities and their key stakeholders not only map on to the four pillars but also relate to and influence one another, hence reinforcing and equally pulling in opposite directions. For purposes of this study, we adopted this

holistic view of university autonomy (figure 1.1) as the conceptual framework of the book. To explore it, we contacted a large number of academics throughout the world and invited them to contribute case studies exploring aspects of institutional university autonomy. Following a review of abstracts that we received, the case studies presented here were selected.

A number of unexpected aspects in the selection and eventual production and analysis of the case studies have emerged. The first was perhaps the most surprising. Many contributors whose abstracts promised genuinely new insights subsequently had to withdraw because of a measure of direct or effective censorship or recognition of the sensitivities of colleagues, institutions, and/or governments to what they might say. Here are some statements from the correspondence we had with some of the contributors: *"I can't send you my contribution due to the formal organizational reasons"; "my [university] senior management informed me that they did not wish me to go ahead with the chapter I had proposed"; "the material was planned to be quite critical, but it can't be approved by my [university] administration"; "I am being held up by the need for others to check what I send out and what I make public and/or keep private"; "there would have been nothing of any significance left"; "the rules in my [university] dramatically changed since I agreed to contribute, and now … it must be approved by the administration"; "I was strongly advised not to proceed"; "[the administration] may not be happy about everything I write becoming available in the public domain."*

These responses were surprising and disappointing, but they underline the fact that full academic autonomy may be limited in ways that are not always overt and may involve background, subtle, political, and social pressures that may, nevertheless, exert a powerful influence. The examples quoted above ostensibly relate to the academic freedom of the individual, but there is also a hint that the limitations experienced by the individual may arise because the institution or a senior manager is sensitive or feels under pressure and is not confident enough in the exercise of autonomy to allow a "publish and be damned" culture to pervade the academic institution.

Limitations of this sort had been anticipated in relation to the nature and type of research that might be carried out. The reduction in state funding, more directive government research policies, the emphasis on applied, impact research, direct funding from business and industry, and the need to recover full costs have all placed effective limits on the autonomy of institutions, departments, and individuals in their research, and this is illustrated in the case studies in this publication.

The other outcome of the review of abstracts and the case studies, which should perhaps have been anticipated, is the extent to which academic colleagues working in a range of disciplines and not directly engaged with research on university autonomy do not always perceive or engage with the autonomy implications or outcomes of their work, and as a result, their own case study may not fully identify the autonomy impact – real or potential. It emerges that many academic staff take for granted university autonomy without questioning its sometimes contradictory assumptions and impacts. Perhaps this should not have been surprising since classically, academics are focused on their own research, and their own subject area and department insofar as these impact on their work and they interact with colleagues in their wider national and international subject fraternity.

Nevertheless, it is a matter of concern since effective autonomy can only be realized if there is a fuller engagement and understanding of the implications for the