

Introduction according to zgaga, the concept of academic

[Economics](#), [Globalization](#)



Introduction The concept of academic autonomy has changed significantly during the last decades and Weiler (2005) considers that the relative importance of the autonomy of the individual scholar and the autonomy of the institution is one of the ambivalences that universities have in the new context. Referring to the general developments of education in Europe after 1980, Henkel (2007) talks about two challenges that academic autonomy is facing: one is that governments preside over 'knowledge societies' in which they see knowledge as the main driver of economic and social prosperity, and the second one is that of redefinition of the relation of the state and market. It implies that the traditional concept of academic autonomy with clear boundaries and no state intrusion is not possible in today's context. Moreover, Zgaga (2012) considers that "the concept of university autonomy would be seriously simplified and endangered if it were put together on a continuum with 'full state control and no autonomy on one end' and 'full autonomy and no more state control' on the other hand" (p. 5). According to Zgaga, the concept of academic autonomy is referred to a constantly changing relationship between the state and higher education institutions which depends on national contexts, circumstances, academic and political cultures. Considering these circumstances, it is very difficult to define the concept of academic autonomy and analyze it in isolation without taking into consideration the context.

Esterman and Nokkala (2009) claim that there is no 'ideal model of autonomy', suggesting that there are "a set of principles that constitute crucial elements of autonomy, and that, when implemented in the context of a given system, support universities in carrying out ever more complex

missions” (p. 7). These principles are included in the EUA’s Lisbon declaration (2007) within four dimensions that define autonomy: organizational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy and were the basis for the study of academic autonomy conducted with the representatives of public universities of 34 European countries (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009). These four dimensions that look at the ability of universities to decide on organizational structures and institutional governance, financial issues, staffing matters and academic matters will also be used as a framework of this study in the Kosovo context. Academic autonomy has been subject of radical interrogations from the civil society in Kosovo since the end of the conflict in 1999. The international reports also highlight the need for Kosovo to ensure the autonomy and independent operation of higher education institutions, in addition to the need to improve the quality of education significantly and to strengthen research and innovation (European Commission Report for Kosovo, 2016). Thus, the aim of this study is to understand how the educational stakeholders assess the institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the Kosovo context and how do they address the issues and challenges related to the academic autonomy and accountability.

Academic autonomy and accountability in the new context The globalization and neoliberalism had a significant impact to the social and economical context of the states in the last decades and it was inevitably reflected to the higher education as well.

Becker and Trowler (2002) illustrate the relation of the university and new context claiming that “ a scientific discovery in a university in one country will

be exploited to make a technical advance by a company based in another and put into production in yet another country, chosen for its low labour costs and offered for sale by that company's subsidiaries throughout the world" (p. 3). The new circumstances made the governments focus more on creating the 'knowledgeable society' resulting in the transition from 'elite' to 'mass' higher education, which began in '80s mainly in USA and UK, followed by the other developed countries. These developments, the theory of knowledge, conceptualization of knowledge and the rapid developments of the technology changed the mission of the higher education, and inevitably they undermined "...the idea of academia as well defined territory dedicated to its own specialized goals" (Henkel, 2007, p.

91). In order to understand the academic autonomy in the new context, Zgaga (2012) makes a difference between 'philosophical' and 'managerial' discourses of academic autonomy by addressing them as academic individual freedom and institutional autonomy. According to Zgaga, while academic freedom prevailed all debates during '60s to '80s, following the transformation from 'elite' to 'mass' system, academic freedom seems to be a serious issue only in certain countries where democracy is not a self-understandable condition of public life.

Henkel (2005) also highlights that although most higher education institutions continue to control internally the process of preparing and controlling academics, the freedom to determine curriculum content, degree standards and allocation of funds are not universally agreed. In addition, Apple (2016) argues that the education institutions have become a subject of performance

objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum. It implies that in the new context, the quality of education is not only the concern of higher education institutions, since the "...reliance on independent institutions or individual professional to ensure their own quality and standards has been replaced by national standardization" (Henkel, 2007, p. 93). However, Warnock (1992) highlights the importance of the academic autonomy of an institution and reminds that the concept of autonomy means that institutions are self-governing considering that "an institution that is self-governing can govern itself well or ill, despotically or democratically but the principles it adopts and the decisions it makes shall not be dictated from outside and this is much is central to the concept of autonomy." (p.

xx). A crucial part of a self-governing institution is accountability and the new circumstances have imposed creation of the accountability mechanisms related to higher education. Although it has become a significant topic in the last few decades, the need for accountability of higher education has been highlighted even before, in different context. Upon establishing the Berlin Universität back in 1811, Wilhelm von Humboldt claimed that the state must not intrude the university but at the same time, he reminded that the intellectual freedom "can be threatened not only by the state, but also by intellectual institutions which tend to develop, at their birth, a certain outlook and which will therefore readily resist the emergence of another outlook." (Humboldt, 1970, as cited by Zgaga, pp.

224, 246). It is asserted also by Weiler (2005) who claims that the ambivalence that exists related to academic autonomy in the new

context can serve as a great mechanism of defense for a university that tries to avoid accountability for its results and accomplishment. Therefore, the state must seek to avoid the harm, which can possibly arise from this source as "autonomy cannot be an excuse to exclude abuses of autonomy (e. g. corruption within institutions) from a critical discussion as well as prosecution (Zgaga, 2012).

These issues highlight the need for an increased cooperation between the higher education institutions and the relevant stakeholders in order to respond effectively to the demands of the new environment as academic autonomy can also function outside the 'traditional borders'. Zgaga (2012) suggests that the academic freedom is a matter of continuous negotiation since "the university cannot live in its thoughts only and society needs knowledge to survive". Further, Zgaga considers that the countries shall focus on a set of recognized principles of values which should direct the actions of different actors rather than search for an "ideal" to move close to. Neave, as cited by Henkel (2007) also highlights that the outcomes of negotiations are not entirely predictable and thus the autonomy can be enhanced or reduced. It implies that it depends on the parties that are part of the negotiations, and if the parties are weak, the decision will be weak.

It becomes a process, which comprises by setting limits and continuing the negotiation, since "academic freedom is not something given as a right; it is won and not once and for all" (Henkel, 2007, p. 96). Assessing academic autonomy Given the fact that higher education institutions in European countries have different approaches toward the assessment academic

autonomy, the European University Association (EUA) sets out general principles of institutional autonomy which consists of academic, financial, organizational and staffing autonomy (Lisbon Declaration, 2007).

These principles have been used as basis point by Estermann and Nokkalato analyze and assess the academic autonomy in 34 countries of Europe.

Their study has been focused on the ability to introduce or terminate degree programs, to define the structure and content of degree programs, roles and responsibilities with regard to the quality assurance of programs and degrees, the extent of control over students admission (academic autonomy); the ability to establish structures and governing bodies, university leadership and who is accountable to whom (organizational autonomy); the ability to charge tuition fees, to accumulate surplus, to borrow and raise money from different sources, the ability to own land and buildings, reporting procedures as accountability tools (financial autonomy); and the capacity to recruit staff, the responsibility for terms of employment (staffing autonomy). Academic autonomy in Kosovo higher education Academic autonomy remains one of the challenges, which is addressed by both civil society in Kosovo as well as by international reports. The public University of Prishtina (UP) is the most referred source to the public discourses related to the academic autonomy.

Gashi (2013) claim that since it has been founded, the UP played a key role in political developments in Kosovo and it was, at the same time, a victim of political interferences. Thus, influenced by political developments, the issue of academic autonomy is mainly addressed within the ' political

interferences' context, thus undermining discussions about academic autonomy and accountability as matter of negotiation between the state, society and universities. In addition, the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are still remaining vague terms. Thus, the purpose of this article is to understand how the main education stakeholders assess academic autonomy and accountability in higher education within the Kosovo context and how are the issues and challenges addressed. The four dimensions that define autonomy set out in EUA's Lisbon declaration (2007) will be used as a framework of this study. Methodology, participants, data collection and analysis As Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) claim that "qualitative research seeks ... to obtain in-depth understanding about the way things are, why they are that way, and how participants in the context perceive it" (p. 14), this study employs the qualitative approach.

A purposive sample will be applied and the participants will be representatives of different local educational actors: a vice rector of UP, a professor of UP, a representative of the Ministry of Education (Department of Higher Education), a representative of the Agency of Accreditation, a representative of civil society, and a representative of an international organization. The data are gathered through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The interview questions will be basically compiled based on the academic autonomy principles set out in the Lisbon Declaration (2007). The data collected will be transcribed and analyzed and compared with the documents analysis and notes, such as the statute of the University of Prishtina, and the Law on Higher Education.