

Academic Freedom and Contemporary Universities*

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Abstract—The article analyses the evolution of the notion “Academic freedom” (AF) from the Middle Ages to the present times. “Academic freedoms” were known in Bologna University and Sorbonne in Paris in 12-14 centuries, but their meaning was not the same that we perceive nowadays. AF included at those times rights and privileges of university professors, students and sometimes their families. It was provision of financial support and protection provided by Roman Catholic Church, or later – governments of European lands.

AF has changed its meaning in the beginning of the 19th century. V. Fon Humboldt reconsidered the notion of AF, and since then we have understood AF as the freedom to think independently, freedom of scientific search and freedom to choose university courses for students. This meaning is reflected in many documents of academic associations and organizations, such as Magna Charta Universitatum, American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and particular universities. Academic freedom in our modern understanding was an initial value for universities of highly developing industrial world. The article shows that now Academic freedom is in the crisis, but the main reason of its crisis is global economic crisis, new requirements to universities and higher education in a modern globalized world.

Keywords: *academic freedom, ethics, publication ethics, scientific ethics, university*

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic freedom is one of the key values of academic professors worldwide. It is reflected in many documents and declarations of the international and national organizations of academic community.

Despite the fact that academics and universities highly evaluate academic freedom (AF), there is no clear understanding what it is. Usually academic freedom is understood as freedom to conduct scientific research without pressure from governmental bodies, political parties, religious organizations and other interested parties; for teachers academic freedom means creating courses as they see fit; for students it is the right to choose courses and direction of their scientific search. This statement

automatically raises question about the financial base of academic activities. Research work and educational courses require financial funding and other resources. One of the most well-known organizations that interprets AF, mentions the problem of funding and financial dependence of academics in the very beginning of the AF definition. According to “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” by American Association of University Professors (AAUP) “Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution” [1]. This simple fact, dependence of research and education from financial funding often is not reflected in the definitions of AF, contributing to the spreading of the idealistic and unreal understanding of AF. For example, the definition in the digital encyclopedia Britannica describes AF as “the freedom of teachers and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure” [2]. This definition claims that AF should not be violated by interested parties like governments, public opinion and etc., but at the same time the author of the article argues that United States was the “bastion” of AF in the 20th century, despite the fact that some professors lost the jobs due to their sympathy to communist ideas. Moreover, in the middle of the 20th century American academics had to “sign a certificate stating that they were not and never had been Communists, and by vague and over broad restrictions on verbal and written expression” [3]. The statement of Britannica’s article looks like the attempt to draw a strong correlation between a particular political regime of some western countries and AF, at the same time blaming governments of some countries in violating AF.

Another concern about AF is what level of AF is required for an acceptable work of scientists and teachers. Will they work better with absolute independence? If we postulate that the only one will of scientists and teachers is conducting research and desire to make wonderful courses we can be sure that academics are in need of absolute AF. In reality, universities are consist of ordinary people with their sicknesses, interests, vices and necessity to play other roles like roles of family members, social activists, and fulfill other important duties. Of course, the academic community

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differs from many less educated and marginalized people, but they are not saints. There are many studies showing that scientists not rare break the rules of scientific ethics in order to publish more articles, archive their career goals, report on their work that has been funding or even proof the theories and hypothesizes [4] [5] [6] [7].

The aim of this article is to describe possible embodiment of the idea of AF in higher school institutions nowadays, limitations of the idea's implementation and the endangerment that the idea of AF brings to higher education.

II. ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THE MIDDLE AGES

First European universities appeared in the 10-11 centuries as communities of teachers (masters) and students. In the very beginning of the higher school institutionalization the school followed the masters and universities had no any particular place and easily could change cities, then masters followed the schools [8]. The establishment of European universities required two preconditions: 1) self-governance and 2) license from supreme authority [9]. The last one first universities obtained by different ways. The Bologna University received its rights and freedoms in the 12 century by serving Frederick I Barbarossa and lobbying his interests. At those times there was a problem of relations between the State and the Church. Interested parties raised questions about laws regulated these relations and each party was in need of their own ideology, religious, philosophical and historical proofs of their claims to the throne. Law experts from the university helped to justify his rights to Roman lands. In 1158 Frederick I Barbarossa "promulgated a *Constitutio Habita*, establishing that every school be established as a "societas di socii" (group of students) overseen by a master (dominus) remunerated by the sums paid to him by the students" [10]. The empire undertook to protect travelling students from local authorities, for example, in the case they were going to arrest scholars for debts of their compatriots. This event has become "a fundamental event in the history of European university" [10]. The Pope gave rights, freedoms and benefits to academic community organized around the university, first of all, because this union was fruitful for both parties. University of those times never contradicted ruling religious authorities – Roman Catholic Church, scholars contributed to economical life of countries and local communities, created educational and cultural centers.

Some decades later, in 1231 the Pope Gregory IX issued a papal bull *Parens Scientiarum* (Latin: The Mother of Science) [11]. In this document the organizational structure of the University of Paris was established, and since then the university became officially recognized institution highly evaluated by the Pope, one of the most powerful authorities of the Western world, as "The Mother of Science".

One of the key characteristics of universities was creation of knowledge, not only transferring of information. This function of universities, their status of "mother of science" required academic freedom, because it was hardly possible to create or find new knowledge without free search. At the

same time communities of masters and students were in permanent danger in 10-11 centuries without support of authorities like Pope or king, this need to protect themselves made universities to struggle for independence from local authorities of particular cities. Pope was the best protector for a new educational phenomenon of those times – university, because his patronage gave universities unified system of degrees (masters, doctors, etc.) that were recognized on the territory of Western Europe, similar organizational structure. It was Roman Catholic Church that provided a background for European system of higher education.

After receiving the financial independence, lands and positions in Roman Catholic Church university professors began to lose the desire for knowledge and study, intention to create and update courses due to their comfort living without necessity to look for appropriate wage. The position of university professor very soon became desirable for young students and social lifts began to disappear. Passing of a public exam to obtain master degree at the faculty of philosophy and doctoral degree at other faculties slowly transformed into an expensive ritual [9]. It was not possible not to pass the exam: everything had been planned before, everybody played his role. Expensive gifts had been given to the professors and even the ritual of exam cost money. Such a way financial corporate independence hit the intellectual activity of medieval university's community and caused crisis.

III. HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY MODEL: A WAY TO OVERCOME THE CRISIS

In the Modern era there were some attempts to resuscitate universities and one of the most successful was Humboldt university model. Wilhelm von Humboldt was the official in Prussia, the head of directorate of education since 1809 and contributed significantly to the governmental education system, formulated mission of a university and developed its principles. He believed that "reason cannot desire for man any other condition than that in which each individual not only enjoys the most absolute freedom of developing himself by his own energies ... according to the measure of his wants and instincts, and restricted only by the limits of his powers and his rights" [12]. The key characteristics of the new university were "free person", "free research", "free education" and "free knowledge" [13]. He gave the teachers a freedom to organize their courses as they think would be better, and students could choose the courses they would study. That was the "freedom of education" principle. At the same time university teachers had to be scientists, and prove that by the publishing articles and monographs on their scientific fields [14]. Such a way Humboldt embodied the principle of "utility of science and education". That was the new academic freedom of universities, as we understand AF today: it is a freedom of creativity, freedom to consider notions and practices and freedom to search for the scientific truth. Humboldt university model has spread all over the world since the first part of the 19th century.

New university has no positions in the Church for its professors or agricultural lands which generated revenue. The salary was paid to university staff by governmental officials according to their scientific results and popularity among students. It means that the main customer and employer of university became a government. In the 19th-20th centuries there was a demand on scientific and technological progress and industrialization, broad-minded and educated people that could freely benefited a state. National universities had to satisfy these governmental needs and it was a state that paid for the universities' academic freedom and was interested in it. Genius of Wilhelm von Humboldt made an organizational structure in which universities as educational institutions were interested in producing knowledge, and in the ideal circumstances the process of creating new knowledge require academic freedom in Humboldt's interpretation.

IV. THE CHALLENGE TO THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES

Today we live in the world of transnational companies and banks that easily cross the borders of the states. It means that nowadays universities have not the center or social institute (like Roman Catholic Church of a state in previous times) which would provide them with financial support. Higher education institutions have to look for many sources of income, for example, collaborations with commercial companies, governments, non-profit organizations and international associations and organizations. From the one hand this fact contributes to the academic freedom, making universities more independent from the only one sovereign, king or Pope. Theoretically, new circumstances in which universities exist today would have to increase academic freedom in universities' walls.

From the other hand, universities now compete on the global market of education, trying to attract customers – applicants, governmental and international funds. Bill Readings in his "The University in Ruins" considered the popular term "excellence" in higher education management [15]. He argued that this term was empty, it was just the way to say something like: "our university is better than a, b, c, etc. universities". How can we measure the excellence? – he asks. Excellence can be measured even in a number of parking places near the university, but it tells us nothing about the quality of education. In order to compete in excellence higher education institutions use special scales. For example, the measurements could be done by number of articles, indexed by Scopus and Web of Science per faculty or a researcher, successful alumni with high wages, number of buildings and student hostels. The absence of one sovereign or social institution that patronizes universities brings the absence of the request to the system of higher education and makes it search for financial support, instability, readiness to fit the requirements of the market that is never stable. When academic community has to think how to sell their work and activities, academic freedom, as freedom to choose a direction of research, decreases.

Many problems in the field of publication ethics show us that scientists and academic researchers are often interested

in number of publications and in publications in journals with high impacts rather than in publishing results of their work. Plagiarism, fabrication and falsification are the most morally unacceptable forms of scientific misconducts nowadays which can be met in scientific journals [16]. Some studies in the field of publication ethics shows as that misconduct like incorrect analysis, weak conclusion, insufficient number of proves are widespread on the pages of scientific literature. According to some studies, analyzed articles in medical fields "17% of the results did not support the overstated conclusions and 39% performed the incorrect analysis altogether. The research was based on questionnaire and showed that in approximately 30-49% of studies a different analysis should have been undertaken" [17]. University researchers have to satisfy university standards that include scientific outcomes which are measured by number of articles in scientific journals. In the framework of this system many researchers hardly can think about the quality of their research, they must produce outcomes – publications. Such a way chasing "excellence" destroys academic freedom inside souls of academicians without any fight. People are limited in time, they have not time and resources for creativity because they receive money and career development through achievement of quantitative indicators.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of history of academic freedom idea and its embodiment shows that this idea always depend on financial support and its sources. But simple provision of finance and academic freedom destroys the last one. The history of Middle Ages universities demonstrates it. National university, embodied in Humboldt university model cultivated traditions of new academic freedom that had potential to bring fruitful scientific results. But this model could exist only in particular circumstances: 1) strong and developing government; 2) governmental request for objective knowledge (not request for quantitative indicators of scientific work).

Nowadays states hardly satisfy this requirements and market plays a significant role in higher education. Market value creativity and scientific research only as product, research outcomes have to be sold, only such a way they obtain their value. In the lite of this situation scientific truth and academic freedom are second-order values and depend on their merchantability. Modern problem of academic freedom is not the protection of the value, but how to make it valuable again. Such definition of the problem raises another question: are we in need of academic freedom today? The epochs change each other and maybe we should rethink our values, including academic freedom. Maybe we should forget academic freedom as an integral value of universities in a history landfill.

This statement looks horrible despite the fact that we often think about number of articles per year, and maybe more often than about search for scientific knowledge. And this feeling is right, because free search for knowledge cannot exist without a dose of academic freedom. Humboldt

university model appeared in the period of high industrial growth of Prussia, new university was the answer to challenge of time for the European country. Today we live in permanent global economic crisis. It means that academic freedom will suffer with the world.

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